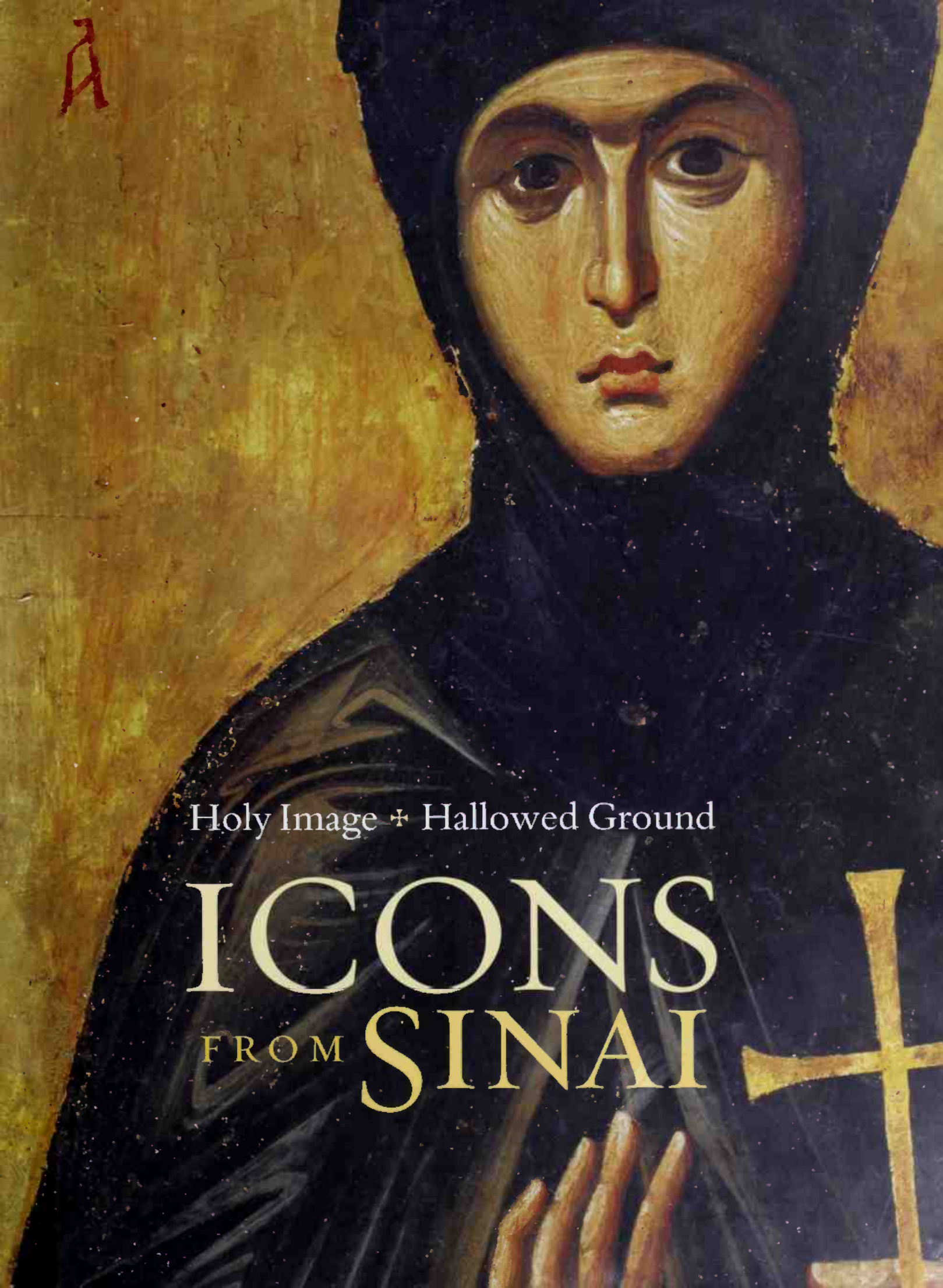
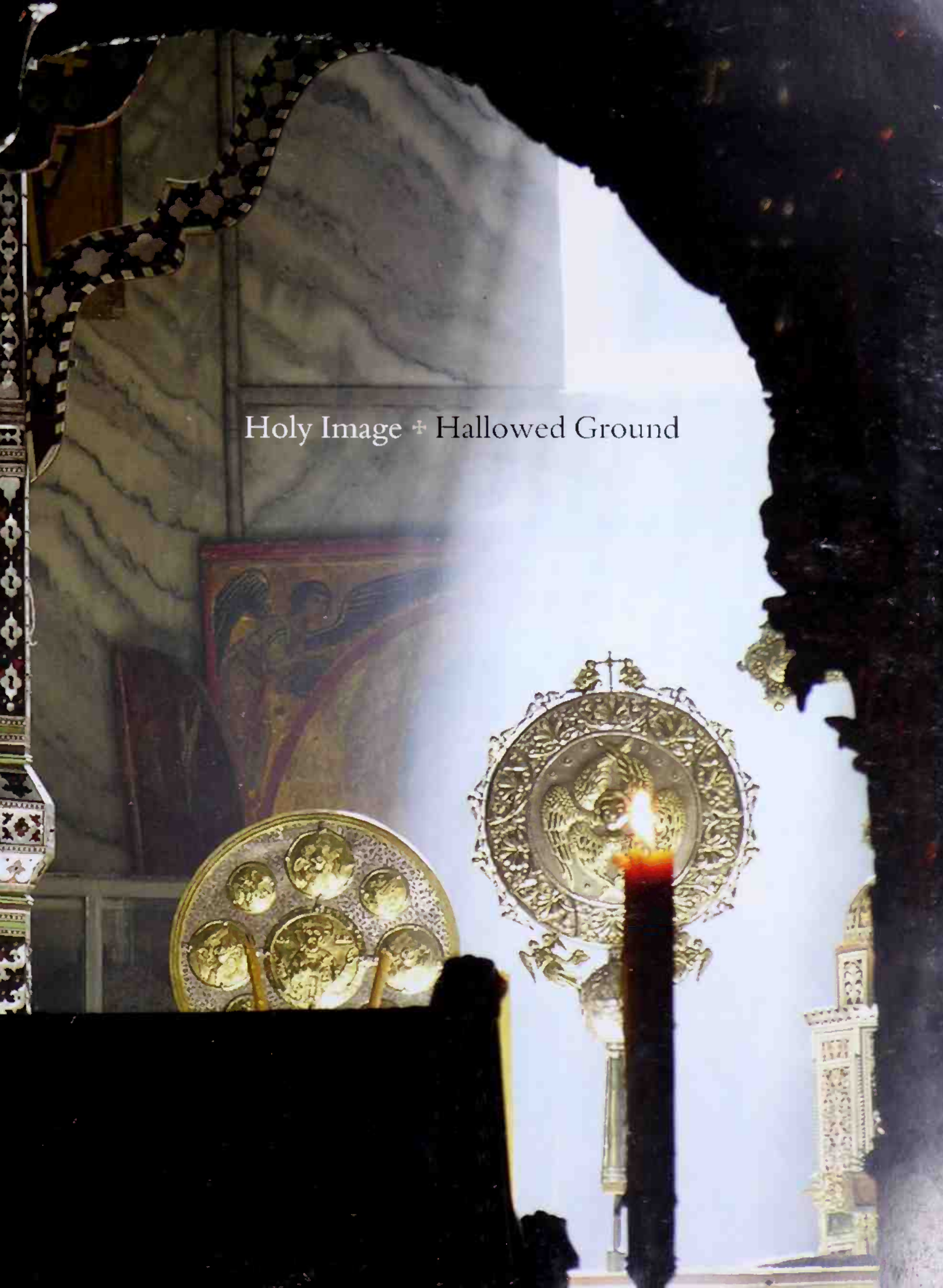


Holy Image ✣ Hallowed Ground

ICONS FROM SINAI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Holy Image ✝ Hallowed Ground

ICONS FROM SINAI

EDITED BY ROBERT S. NELSON AND KRISTEN M. COLLINS

THE J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM, LOS ANGELES

ΓΟΘΕΟΒ

ΟΡΩϹ ϹΗ

This publication is issued in conjunction with the exhibition *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai*, held at the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, from November 14, 2006, to March 4, 2007.

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FRONT COVER: Saint Theodosia, early thirteenth century (detail, cat. no. 46).
FRONTISPIECE: View through iconostasis door, the Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine at Sinai; photo by Robert S. Nelson (detail, fig. 28).
PAGE II: Saint Macarius and a Cherub, thirteenth century (detail, cat. no. 44).
PAGES IV–V: Iacovos Moskos, View of Mount Sinai with Scenes of Monastic Life, 1700–1725 (detail, cat. no. 43).
PAGE VIII: Georgios Klontzas, Transfiguration with Scenes of Monastic Life, 1603 (detail, cat. no. 42).
PAGE X: View of passageway with a monk, Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine at Sinai; photo by Bruce White.
BACK COVER: (top) The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine at Sinai (detail, fig. 2); (bottom) Apse, Chapel of the Burning Bush, the Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine at Sinai (detail, fig. 70).
SPINE: Saint Peter the Apostle, sixth century (detail, cat. no. 1).

NOTE: Unless otherwise noted, inscriptions on objects illustrated in the catalogue are reproduced as they appear on the works themselves and include original scribal errors.

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Archbishop's Foreword

Moses, Moses. Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.
—EXODUS 3:4–5

GOD-TRODDEN MOUNT SINAI is forever sacred as the place where the great events and theophanies of the Old Testament fixed and sealed the history of humankind. Here, at the place of the Burning Bush, God instructed His elect servant Moses, and when He had revealed Himself ("I AM THAT I AM"), sent him to Pharaoh to deliver the Children of Israel and take them through the wilderness of Sinai to the Promised Land. Here is Mount Horeb with Sinai the summit, the peak of the Decalogue—the place where, in the midst of darkness and fire, God revealed to the great God-seer Moses the mystery of His Creation and His divine Law.

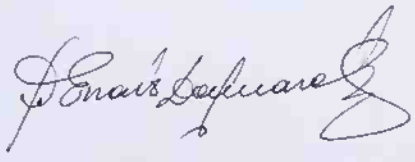
This mountain again received the grace of God "as a gentle breeze" with the coming of the Prophet Elias, and here holy men settled, who, longing for communion with God in silence and prayer, "abandoned the city and made a city of the wilderness." Thus the settlement of Christian hermits commenced by the end of the third and the beginning of the fourth century at the place of the Burning Bush, beneath the mount of the Decalogue, and continued into the mountainous wilderness of the south Sinai.

Compunctionate prayer, tears of repentance, and purification of the heart preserved and augmented divine grace at this place, and this grace has sanctified those pilgrims who have come here out of piety through the centuries. In addition, a multitude of pilgrims have come here from the West, and the monastery has established and maintained beneficial friendly relations with them since the Middle Ages.

The healing ascetic life with its unceasing prayer does not bring salvation to only the ascetics themselves; it has contributed and is contributing to others in perpetuity through prayer and the creation of incomparable spiritual works, such as icons, manuscripts, and other sacred works of art that are treasured at Sinai.

Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai marks the first time an exhibition has focused exclusively on the icons and manuscripts of the Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine at Sinai. Thanks are due to the co-curators of the exhibition, Professor Robert S. Nelson, Robert Lehman Professor of the History of Art at Yale University, and Kristen M. Collins, assistant curator, Department of Manuscripts at the Getty Museum, whose diligent efforts are reflected in this publication. Thanks are also due to Michael Brand, director of the J. Paul Getty Museum, and to his staff.

May all who have labored and all who visit this exhibition receive the grace and blessing of God. May the icons, manuscripts, and other sacred objects depicted here raise our thoughts from the things of this world to the experience of realities on high. Beholding the multicolored spectrum of the icons here below, may we ascend to the perception of the splendor of heaven in the uncreated light of the Triune Godhead.



On behalf of the Holy Council of the Fathers
Archbishop Damianos of Sinai
The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine at Sinai, Egypt

Director's Foreword

Icon painting in the Byzantine Empire was an ancient craft, yet it can appear stunningly modern to our eyes. For pious beholders, icons were more than representations of holy figures; they were expressions of prayer. The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine at Sinai, Egypt, holds the finest collection of Byzantine icons and manuscripts in the world. In the exhibition *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai* the J. Paul Getty Museum is privileged to introduce the public to the compelling history of the monastery and the central role of the icon in the devotional life of monks and patrons.

Saint Catherine's is the oldest continuously operating Christian monastery in existence today, and some of the earliest remaining Byzantine icons still grace its community. Isolated in the Sinai desert at the foot of the mountain where Moses is said to have received the tablets of the Law, the monastery was sequestered from the larger part of the Byzantine Empire and escaped successive waves of iconoclasm that led to the destruction of icons across the empire. Its treasured collection thus preserves an unbroken tradition of icons and allows us to tell the story of icon painting and veneration from the sixth century to the present.

In recent years, under the dynamic leadership of His Eminence, the Archbishop Damianos of Sinai, the monastery has developed relationships with major cultural institutions and foundations throughout the world, in the interest both of better caring for and preserving its buildings and collection and of making them more accessible to scholars and the general public. The Getty Museum welcomes this opportunity to present the first exhibition devoted to Sinai as a collection and as a historical phenomenon.

The Getty's involvement with the monastery began with the expertise provided by the Getty Conservation Institute in the conservation of the apse mosaic and through a grant from the Getty Foundation. I wish to thank Deborah Marrow, then director of the Getty Foundation and now interim president and chief executive officer of the J. Paul Getty Trust. Thanks also to Tim Whalen, director of the Getty Conservation Institute; Joan Weinstein, acting director of the Getty Foundation; and Herbert Lucas, trustee emeritus, for introducing our curators to the Holy Fathers of Saint Catherine's and facilitating our first discussions with them.

This exhibition and catalogue represent an extraordinary effort by many dedicated individuals. I extend my thanks and gratitude to the co-curators of the exhibition, Robert S. Nelson, Robert Lehman Professor of the History of Art at Yale University, and Kristen M. Collins, assistant curator in the Department of Manuscripts at the Getty Museum, who together conceived the intellectual framework for the exhibition and this splendid catalogue. Kristen Collins's diplomacy and determination over several years helped to secure the most important loans, with the ongoing support and commitment of Thomas Kren, the Getty Museum's curator of manuscripts. Sincere appreciation is also extended to Quincy Houghton, assistant director for exhibitions and public programs, and Amber Keller, senior exhibitions coordinator, for their diligence in orchestrating a project of this scale and complexity; as well as to Galina Tirnanic, curatorial assistant in the Department of Manuscripts.

I would like to offer my appreciation to each of the contributors to the catalogue, as well as to conservators Tiarna Doherty, Nancy Turner, and Brian Considine, whose hard work and close observations provided invaluable information that enriched the work from which the authors were able to draw.

The exhibition and this catalogue would not have been possible without the generosity of His Eminence Archbishop Damianos of Sinai and the community of the Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, who kindly opened their doors to the curators and other members of the Getty staff. The Holy Fathers of Mount Sinai made accessible not only their art but also the monastery's liturgy, providing us with a better understanding of the religious life at Saint Catherine's, which the Getty Museum in turn is honored to be able to share with a wider audience. A special debt of gratitude is extended to Zahi Hawass, secretary general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, Egypt, who made it possible for us to exhibit these extremely rare, and rarely exhibited, works.

The Getty is also grateful for the participation of the other institutions that have generously lent their works to the exhibition: the Bohdan and Varvara Khanenko Museum of Arts, Kiev, Ukraine; the Collection of Saint Catherine of Sinai at Irákhon, Crete, Greece; Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C.; and Galleria Estense, Modena, Italy.

We hope that through this exhibition and catalogue, viewers and readers alike will continue to be enriched and enlightened by these cherished icons and their important place in the history of religious imagery.

Michael Brand, Director
The J. Paul Getty Museum

Acknowledgments

To work so closely with the community of the Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine and the extraordinary objects that make up *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai*, has been a great privilege and an honor. The same opportunity has afforded us the chance to work with a range of remarkable individuals from across the globe, whose generosity and creativity are evident throughout the exhibition and this catalogue.

First and foremost we would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the Holy Fathers at Saint Catherine's. The community did far more than make their icons available to us; they shared their time, their experiences and the celebration of the liturgy with the many members of the exhibition team who visited the monastery over the last several years. The fathers enriched our understanding of this monastery and provided invaluable insight into the role of icons in monastic life. We would like to offer particular thanks to His Eminence, the Archbishop Damianos for his guidance, his kindness, and his patience during the long process that led to this exhibition. We are grateful for the countless hours Father Porphyrios, *skevophylax*, spent with the Getty staff during research trips; for Father Justin's deep knowledge of matters both theological and technological; and for Father John Metaxas's wise counsel. We would also like to thank Father Daniel, former *skevophylax*; Father Pavlos, Superior; and Nikolaos Vadis, for their generous contributions to this project. Stergios Stassinopoulos and Nikolaos Smyrnakis of the Benaki Museum in Athens offered valuable advice on matters pertaining to the safe display of these icons, and Dinah McCabe facilitated important initial meetings with His Eminence, the Archbishop Damianos in New York and Athens.

This project has profited from the unflagging support and leadership of Michael Brand, director of the Getty Museum, and his predecessors Deborah Gribbon, former director, and William Griswold, former acting director. Even prior to his arrival at the Getty, Brand devoted considerable effort to the success of this exhibition. Crucial to the realization of this project have been the dedication and commitment of the many Getty staff members involved. In particular we would like to thank Quincy Houghton, head of exhibitions and public programs; Amber Keller, senior exhibition coordinator; Sally Hibbard, chief registrar; and Betsy Severance, registrar.

In 2001 Thomas Kren, curator of manuscripts; Elizabeth Teviotdale, then associate curator of manuscripts; and Robert S. Nelson initiated conversations with the monastery about a possible exhibition. Kren has continued to provide unwavering support for this project. His guidance, sound instincts and generosity of time and effort sustained this endeavor. Galina Tirnanic, curatorial assistant in the Department of Manuscripts, was responsible for maintaining the editorial standards of this catalogue and her many insights have contributed to the quality of the final result. She oversaw the editing of the Greek inscriptions for the catalogue and created gallery texts for the exhibition. Georgi Parpulov, former manuscripts intern, provided valuable archival research. We would also like to thank Elizabeth Morrison, associate curator of manuscripts, as well as Leslie Deleon, Brandi Franzman, and Robert Schindler for their assistance.

The work conducted by the three Getty conservators who made the journey to Sinai cannot be quantified: Tiarna Doherty, Nancy Turner, and Brian Considine contributed technical knowledge and expertise with their close observations on the works in the exhibition. Their energy, resourcefulness, and insights were a source of valuable assistance, both at Sinai and at home. In addition, Rita Gomez's careful work at the monastery facilitated the safe transfer of these objects to the Getty.

We also benefited from the experiences of Getty professionals whose work in Egypt paved the way for this project. Our sincere thanks go to Herbert Lucas, trustee emeritus; Joan Weinstein, acting director of the Getty Foundation; Tim Whalen, director of the Getty Conservation Institute; and Antoine Wilmering, program officer at the Getty Foundation. We would also like to thank, in Egypt, Dr. Zahi Hawass, director of the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities, for his generosity in allowing these rare and beautiful works to travel to the United States. Romany Helmy, his wife, Mary, and their children, Ramy and Sarah, facilitated

our work at the monastery and in Cairo with unfailing competence, professionalism, and warm hospitality. Bruce White provided many of the extraordinary photographs that brought this catalogue to life.

At Getty Publications, we owe more than we can express to Dinah Berland, editor, and Amita Molloy, production coordinator, for their steady guidance and to Kurt Hauser, designer, for the exceptionally beautiful catalogue design. Appreciation is also extended to editorial consultants Nomi Kleinmuntz for editing the authors' contributions, Jayne Kuchna for editing the bibliographic material, and Karen Stough and Gregory A. Dobie for proofreading. We are also grateful to Mark Greenberg, editor in chief, for his involvement and support. Consultant Catie Mihalopoulos contributed to the project research and assisted with the preparation of the Greek inscriptions for the catalogue. We would also like to thank Monica Case and Cecily Gardner for photo research and Greg Glover, Unisys Technical Support, for technical assistance.

Particular thanks are extended to Getty Exhibition Design under the leadership of Merritt Price. Reid Hoffman, former lead designer, created the initial plan for the exhibition. Simon Adlam, current lead designer, and his colleagues Robert Checchi and Michael Lira, have shown great resourcefulness and ingenuity in creating a setting that evokes these objects' original context. Joining them in this effort, Bruce Metro, manager, Preparations, and his team have lent their many years of experience to the safe and beautiful display of the objects illustrated here. Thanks also to Catherine Comeau and Stephanie Ford, exhibition editors; and to Peggy Fogelman of Museum Education and her colleagues Maite Alvarez, Clare Kunny, and Peter Tokofsky.

Mark Leonard and Yvonne Szafran, Paintings Conservation, as well as Scott Schaefer, curator of Paintings, generously shared their time and expertise on issues related to paintings on panel, and Katrina Posner contributed to the care and display of the liturgical silver from Dumbarton Oaks. At the Getty Conservation Institute, our esteemed colleagues David Carson, Giacomo Chiari, Eric Doehne, Jim Druzik, Shin Maekawa, Joy Mazurek, and Karen Trentelman, as well as Arlen Heginbotham and Michael Quick at the Museum, conducted valuable materials research and provided scientific advice for this project.

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At the Getty Museum, we would like to thank Sophia Allison, Carole Campbell, Sandy Johnson, Paige-Marie Ketner, Susan McGinty, and Hilary Walter, as well as Mikka Gee Conway, assistant director for museum advancement. At the Getty Research Institute, we would like to thank Jay Gam, Ross Garcia and Aimée Lind for their patience and resourcefulness.

We would also like to extend our sincere gratitude to Alison Glazier, acting head of interactive media at the Getty, and Lyn Goldfarb, documentarian, for the creation of a beautiful and evocative film for the exhibition. Thanks as well to the talented individuals of the film crew who accompanied us to the monastery in order to film the Holy Week services: Michael Chin, Doug Dunderdale, and Dean Hayasaka, as well as Vasileios Marinis, who provided translation and consulting.

We are especially indebted to our colleagues from outside institutions who contributed to this project, above all Helen Evans at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, but also George Bisacca, Herb Moskowitz, and Mahrukh Tarapour. They generously shared the experience and insights born of their own work at Sinai.

At Dumbarton Oaks, Gudrun Bühl and Edward Keenan made possible the loan of the sixth-century liturgical silver, while Alice-Mary Talbot generously provided invaluable proofreading assistance with the Greek inscriptions in our catalogue.

Thanks go as well to the other lenders to the exhibition, for their generosity and willingness to contribute works that allowed us to more fully explain the history and significance of the monastery: at the Bohdan and Varvara Khanenko Museum of Arts in Kiev, Ms. Vira Vinogradova and Ms. Olena Victorivna Zhivkova; at the Thirteenth Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities in Crete, Mr. Michael G. Andrianakis, former director, and Paris Epitropakis, archaeologist; and at the Galleria Estense in Modena, Dott.ssa Maria Grazia Bernardini, *soprintendente*.

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Robert S. Nelson
Yale University

Kristen M. Collins
The J. Paul Getty Museum

Where God Walked and Monks Pray

Robert S. Nelson

PLACE

The Sinai is scorching hot in the summer, numbing cold in the winter, and parched always. By day, the searing light bedazzles the eyes and washes out the details of photographs. At night, a darkness, never experienced by urban dwellers, exposes a canopy of brilliant stars overhead. In the spring, sandstorms sweep across the desert from the west; snow falls in the higher elevations in the winter (fig. 2). To the south, luxury hotels line the Gulf of Aqaba and present an imaginary Orient to the sun starved. In the interior of the peninsula, however, the people and terrain belong to another world. A broad massif of pink granite and stark mountains replaces the flat, sandy coast. The sharp-edged igneous rock cuts unprotected hands and feet and sends foolish hikers back to established paths. The central Sinai is not a region for casual tourism. To visit, much less live there, requires determination and dedication.[1]

Through the wilderness of this peninsula wandered the ancient Israelites of the Bible after Moses led them out of Egypt and across the parted Red Sea. It is a wilderness with an accent on *wild*, the original sense of the word, before the Industrial Revolution, Romanticism, and ecology rendered the wilderness vulnerable, vanishing, and in need of human nurture. At the spiritual heart of the peninsula today is the Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine at Sinai, erected by the Byzantine emperor Justinian in the sixth century (fig. 2). For centuries, its thick walls protected the monks and their church (fig. 3). Sheer mountain escarpments on two sides of the monastery throw it into deep shade late in the day (fig. 4). From within the monastery, these majestic mountains are a constant presence. In the late afternoon, the warm light of the setting sun sets the mountains' reddish stone on fire. Immediately to the west, a natural oasis and its cool green vegetation make a sharp contrast with the broad, brown desert plain of er-Raha that lies beyond (fig. 5), the principal means of access to the monastery.

At this place, tradition holds, Moses encountered a burning bush and the voice of God, as described in the book of Exodus:

> Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. [God said,] "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." (EXOD. 3:1–5)

Figure 1 (opposite)
Icon of James Adelphotheos with Liturgical Scroll, ca. 1200 (see fig. 115), by lamplight in the Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
Photo: Robert S. Nelson.

Figure 2 (opposite)
The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine at the base of Jebel Musa, Mount Sinai, Egypt. Photo: Georg Gerster/Photo Researchers, Inc.

Figure 3 (above)
The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, from the northeast. Photo: Robert S. Nelson.

Later God spoke again to Moses and summoned him to receive the Ten Commandments where "the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai" (EXOD. 24:16). Descending with the tablets of stone, Moses saw that his people meanwhile had turned to worshipping a golden calf, and he broke the tablets in anger. Again God called Moses to Mount Sinai, where "the Lord descended in a cloud and stood with him there" (EXOD. 34:5) and inscribed a second set of tablets. All this took place on what the monks of Saint Catherine's monastery call "the God-trodden Mount of Sinai."

Christians have been coming to this harsh and isolated region since the second century to practice the ascetic life. In the 380s, the nun Egeria visited the Holy Land and the Sinai and wrote to her sisters in western Europe about what she observed. The beginning of her account has been lost, and the narrative opens well into the journey, with the approach to Mount Sinai:

> In the meanwhile we were walking along between the mountains, and came to a spot where they opened out to form an endless valley—a huge plain, and very beautiful—across which we could see Sinai, the holy Mount of God. . . . When we arrived there our guides, the holy men who were with us, said, "it is usual for the people who come here to say a prayer when first they catch sight of the Mount of God," and we did as they suggested. . . . This is the huge flat valley in which the children of Israel were waiting while holy Moses went up into the Mount of God and was there "forty days and forty nights." It is the valley where the [Golden] calf was made. . . . [I]t was at the head of this very valley that holy Moses pastured the cattle of his father-in-law and God spoke to him twice from the burning bush.[2]

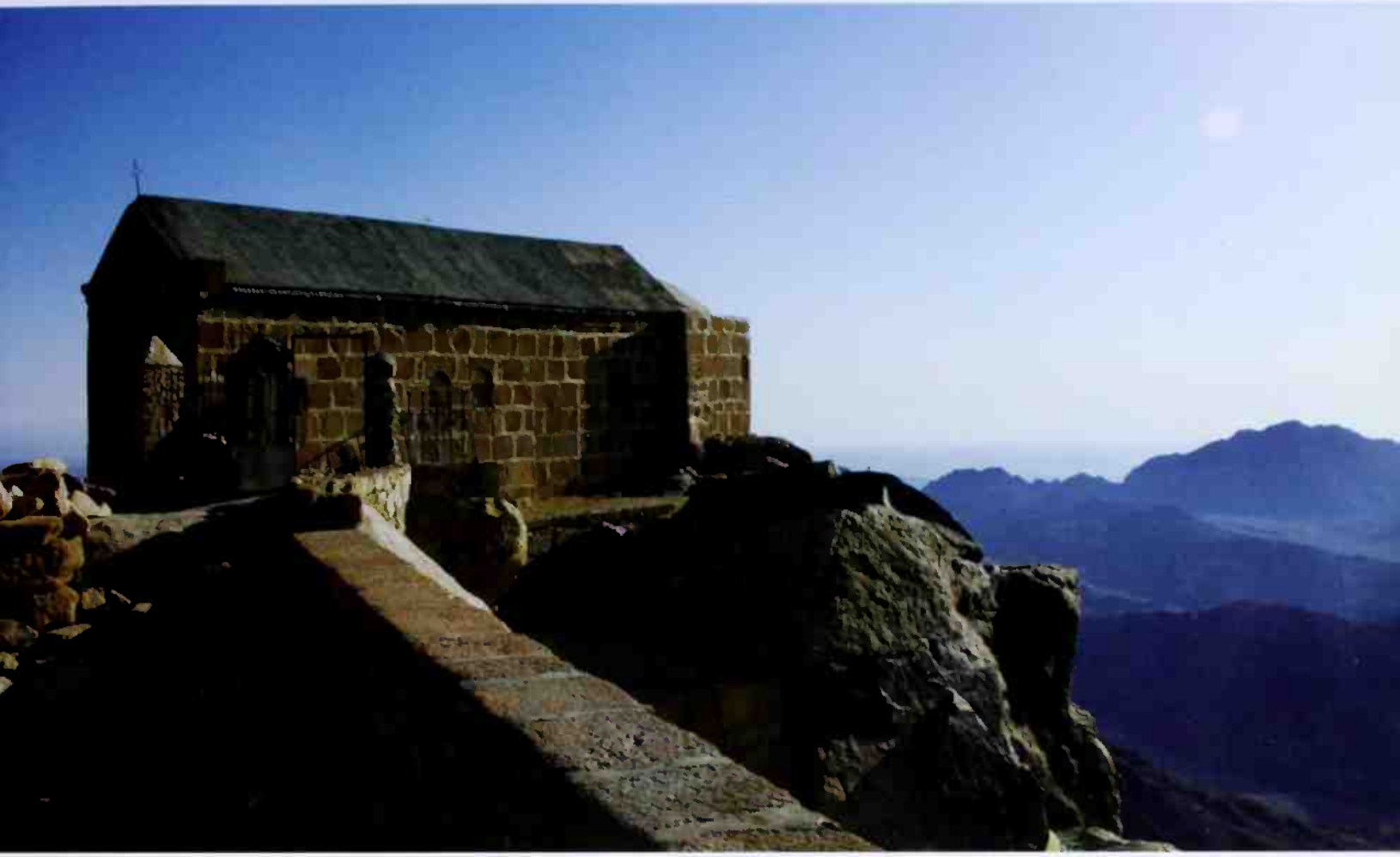
Figure 4 (following pages)
The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, from Jebel Musa. Photo: Robert S. Nelson.

Figure 5 (above)
Plain of er-Raha from near the monastery. Photo: Robert S. Nelson.

Figure 6 (left)
Plateau below the summit of Jebel Musa. Photo: Robert S. Nelson.

Figure 7 (opposite, top)
Church on the summit of Jebel Musa. Photo: Kristen M. Collins.

Figure 8 (opposite, bottom)
Ancient stairs to Jebel Musa and the first of two arches. Photo: Robert S. Nelson.



A modern hotel fills the edge of that broad plain today (fig. 5), but its expanse is still impressive. In these mountains Egeria found monks, who welcomed her party and led them up Mount Sinai. The group climbed the western slope, and Egeria correctly remarked that the actual peak cannot be seen until arriving at a small plateau and oasis (fig. 6). At the base of the peak, where monks once grew fruits and vegetables near their cells, camels today rest from transporting tourists. Having reached the summit, the pilgrims read the account of Moses "on the very spot" where he received the tablets of the Law and celebrated the Eucharist in a small church, although not the sixth-century building seen today (fig. 7). Afterward the monks showed them the nearby cave of Moses. The group descended through the contiguous Mount Horeb (Jebel Sufsafeh), visited Elijah's cave in front of another church, and paused for more biblical readings, prayer, and the Eucharist. Making their way down the mountain, they did not have the advantage of the sixth- or seventh-century stone steps (fig. 8) that aid modern visitors and enable them to negotiate a rift that runs up the mountain next to the monastery (fig. 2).[2]

The group arrived at the "place of the Bush," where the monastery would be built a century and a half later (fig. 4). There, at the base of the mountain, the fourth-century pilgrims found more monastic cells, a church, and the very Burning Bush from which God spoke. But by this time, Egeria reports, it was too late in the afternoon for the Eucharist, so

she and her company prayed in the church and at the bush, located "in front of the church in a very pretty garden which has plenty of excellent water."[4] Once more they read the appropriate biblical passages and thus merged the present and the past, the earthly and the heavenly, a well-established strategy of pilgrimage then and, in a more secular version, of tourism now. The pilgrims resided with the monks that night, rose early the next morning, celebrated the Eucharist in the church, and continued on to Pharan, the only significant town in the area.

Egeria's account is a valuable introduction to the region and evidence of its already well-established association with the events of Exodus. From her, we learn that there already was a church on the site and that the Burning Bush was "in front" of it and thus on its west side. If her description is accurate, the location of either the present church or the bush has changed since then.[5] The present Chapel of the Burning Bush, marking the site of the original bush, was attached to the back of the apse of the sixth-century church at a later date.[6]

The original entrance to the Justinianic monastery was through a gate on the west that was later closed for security. An inscription on its lintel addresses those entering with Psalm

Figure 9 (opposite and above) Nave of the church before vespers, Easter week. Photo: Robert S. Nelson.

Figure 10 (above right) Father Paul giving Communion in front of the iconostasis. The deacons, Fathers Neilos and Michael, attending. Photo: Robert S. Nelson.

118:20: "This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it." The name of the patron, Emperor Justinian, follows. Walking farther into the monastery, the pilgrim encounters the upper facade of its sixth-century church (fig. 24). Stairs lead down to the entrance. There, to reinforce the message of the inscription on the outer wall of the monastery, the same verse from Psalms is repeated on the underside of the lintel of the main entrance to the church. Contemplating and walking past either inscription puts the pilgrim in the space of the righteous. A second sixth-century inscription on the perpendicular face of the church lintel greets visitors with an adaptation of the story of the Burning Bush (EXOD. 3): "The Lord spoke to Moses in this place, saying I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, I am who I am." On this very site, "I am who I am" spoke to Moses and continues to speak to whomever reads the inscription. This is indeed hallowed ground.[7]

From the threshold, the church that lies ahead presents an initially bewildering prospect in the late afternoon quiet before vespers (fig. 9). The bema is brightly lit by artificial light as

the clergy make their preparations. According to custom, the monks have left open the door of the seventeenth-century iconostasis during this, the first week after Easter. Beyond on the altar can be seen jeweled book covers and liturgical fans of post-Byzantine date (see fig. 27). Above is the justly famous apse mosaic of the Justinianic church (see fig. 15), now obscured by a large post-Byzantine crucifix and a plethora of hanging lamps that have been donated to the church over the past several centuries by many, including the czars of Russia. At the sides, massive white-clad columns support dark capitals carved from local stone. Unseen chapels surround the nave on the north and south sides and especially at the rear. In the northeast corner is the chapel of Saint James, where a triptych of Saint Catherine was lately displayed (cat. no. 58). The iconostasis of the chapel of the Holy Fathers in the opposite corner normally has an icon of the Transfiguration and monastic scenes (cat. no. 42). Joining the two side chapels and extending behind the apse of the church is the celebrated Chapel of the Burning Bush.

In the nave, dark post-Byzantine stalls for monks divide the space into smaller units and provide some seating. Everything else here is either an icon or a lighting device that enables icons to be seen, books read, and liturgies observed. Icons accompany all activities in the nave (fig. 10). Besides the iconostasis, icons ring the high pulpit in the upper right corner of the nave and can be seen on shelves on the side walls (fig. 11). Icons with the saints of each month hang from the twelve columns (figs. 12, 35). The icon for August is in this exhibition (cat. no. 31). Icons are also to be found along the walls of the narthex and in an excellent small museum that the monks have created amid the Justinianic rooms on the north side of the monastery. There normally reside many of the masterpieces in the exhibition. Other icons remain in devotional use in the bema of the church, its chapels, and the other small chapels scattered throughout the monastery. Storage rooms contain hundreds more, making the total holdings of the monastery by far the largest collection of Byzantine icons in the world.

The medieval pilgrim would have seen only a fraction of this great collection at one time. Yet what pilgrims did see controlled and structured access to the holy. Entering into the church through the west door to the narthex, a twelfth-century visitor encountered wooden doors carved by Egyptian artists in the contemporary style of Islamic art of the Fatimid period.[8] At the center of the left wing is the Transfiguration (fig. 13). The faceted compartments define the central star around Christ. Although Islamic in style, the doors are thoroughly Christian in content and are not the only example of Islamic art for Christian audiences in the monastery (see, for example, cat. no. 40). The Transfiguration faces its counterpart on the opposite door, the scene of Zachariah censing the altar (fig. 14). Both images prepare the pilgrim for what is to follow: the great mosaic of the Transfiguration and the performance of the liturgy below.[9]

Today the mosaic (fig. 31) can be seen only from oblique angles, but in the Middle Ages, it dominated the nave because the church had lower chancel barriers and no crucifix. The original sixth-century division, or templon, can be partially reconstructed from the meter-high parapet slabs in the apse area.[10] Columns bearing a simple horizontal entablature would have completed the structure, much as is represented in the paten from the Kaper Koraon Treasure (see cat. no. 37). In the high Middle Ages, other post-and-lintel constructions supported icons. The reconstructed templon in the exhibition suggests something of those medieval screens.

At the center of the apse mosaic stands the majestic figure of Christ (see fig. 16). His radiant white garments, hemmed in gold, are silhouetted against a deep blue mandorla. Five white beams of light extend across the dark blue mandorla to illumine the surrounding figures; two more beams radiate upward. The partially restored ray above Jesus' head leads to the cross on

Figure 11 (right)
Father Justin reading in the nave, a shelf of icons in the background. Photo: Robert S. Nelson.

Figure 12 (below)
South side of the church, with calendar icons on the columns. Photo: Robert S. Nelson.

Figure 13
Panel with the Transfiguration
Left wing of narthex door
The Holy Monastery of Saint
Catherine, Sinai, Egypt.
Photo: Robert S. Nelson.

Figure 14
Panel with Zachariah censing
the altar. Right wing of
narthex door. The Holy
Monastery of Saint Catherine,
Sinai, Egypt.

the underside of the arch above and farther to the medallion of the Lamb of God on the arch (fig. 15).[11] To the left and right of Jesus are the prophets Elijah and Moses. Below and closer to the all-important center, John and James kneel, and Peter, "heavy with sleep" (LUKE 9:32), struggles to awaken. Less alert than the other disciples, Peter is also the more earthbound; his right knee breaks through the outermost band of the ground line. Each apostle reacts to the luminous miracle of Jesus' garments becoming "as white as the light" (MATT. 17:2).

Above the conch of the apse, the mosaic decoration continues across the triumphal arch and the upper east wall of the church (fig. 15). Two elongated angels carry long cross-staffs and extend small globes to the Lamb of God. In the corners are medallion portraits usually identified as Mary and John the Baptist. The double windows above continue the powerful central axis of the apse and are framed with the same mosaic ornament as elsewhere. Next to them are scenes of Moses that are particularly relevant to the monastery. At the left, Moses removes his sandal before a bush, and on the opposite side, he bows his head and humbly receives the tablets from God.

To interpret these sixth-century mosaics and their relevance to the monastery, Jaś Elsner has successfully employed Saint Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses* and other early sources. For example, according to Gregory, the light of the Burning Bush will shine on those

> who continue in this quiet and peaceful course of life, . . . illuminating the eyes of our soul with its own rays. This truth, which was then manifested by the ineffable and mysterious illumination which came to Moses, is God.[12]

The light is truth and God, and it came to Moses, whom Gregory understood to be the prefiguration of Christ.[13] Appropriately sacralized, physical light—for these and other early authors—leads the devout to a light invisible to bodily eyes, the light of God.[14]

Elsner explains the somnolent Peter by recourse to the *Heavenly Ladder* of Saint John Climacus, the abbot of this very monastery in the later sixth century or early seventh century and the author of a spiritual guide read by laity as well as monks.[15] Both the abbot and his ladder are portrayed in icons and manuscripts at Saint Catherine's (cat. nos. 33, 47–49). In his

Figure 15
Triumphal arch with mosaic decoration. East wall above the apse. The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, Egypt.

Figure 16
Apse mosaic with the Transfiguration. The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, Egypt.

Figure 17 (left)
"On Sloth," a monk asleep over a book. In *The Heavenly Ladder* of Saint John Climacus, twelfth century. Sinai cod. 418 (cat. no. 33), fol. 132r.

Figure 18 (below left)
"On Sleep, Prayer, and the Singing in the Church of Psalms," monks asleep, sounding the semantron, and reading. In *The Heavenly Ladder* of Saint John Climacus, twelfth century. Sinai cod. 418 (cat. no. 33), fol. 170r.

Figure 19 (below right)
Sinai monk sounding the semantron
Photo: Bruce White.

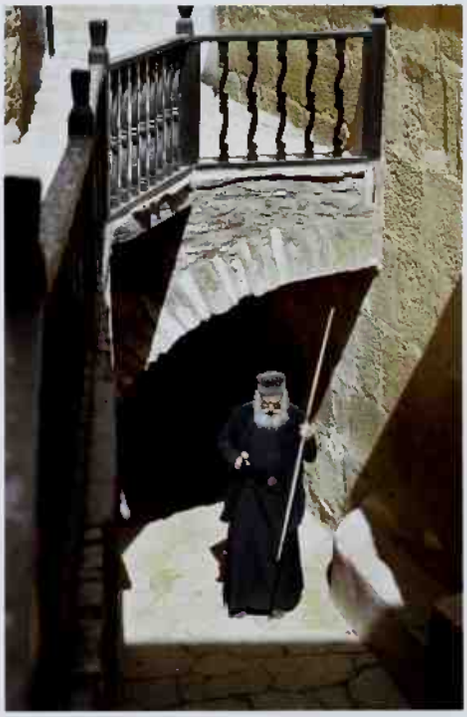


Figure 20
"On Alertness," monks praying. In *The Heavenly Ladder* of Saint John Climacus, twelfth century. Sinai cod. 418 (cat. no. 33), fol. 172r.

treatise, John writes about the dangers of the long vigils, the nocturnal observances common to monastic communities.[16] According to Climacus, sleep can hinder the prayer and must be combated. If the monk prevails, he will receive "light in his heart."[17]

These notions are visualized in several miniatures in the Sinai manuscript of the *Heavenly Ladder* (cat. no. 33). In one, a monk, eyes closed and slumped over a book, has fallen asleep while reading (fig. 17). He represents the sin of sloth. A three-part miniature illustrates the chapter on "sleep, prayer, and the singing in church of Psalms."[18] At the top (fig. 18), a monk pounds the semantron, a long wooden board, to summon the community for prayers, a practice continued to this day (fig. 19). Snug in his comfortable bed at the left, the bad monk does not stir, persuaded by a devilish figure to skip the first hymn of the morning. Opposite him is the "truly obedient" monk, who reads or chants and receives a crown from an angel. At the beginning of the discussion of alertness (fig. 20), monks dutifully pray, read, or chant in church and before "God our King [who] accepts and judges the offerings of each type in accordance with their intentions and abilities."[19]

John Climacus wrote these injunctions in the early seventh century while abbot of this monastery. He needed no more inspiration for the proper behavior of monks than his own experiences as a desert hermit, but the mosaic seen daily in the church may also have been a muse. Of the three disciples, the slumbering Peter makes the abbot's point most succinctly. Physically closest to viewers in the nave below, Peter is also the most earthbound. Like the monks, or the abbot for that matter, he struggles with sleep and thus could serve as a reminder of its dangers.

One spiritual guide and a mosaic evidently did not solve the problems with sleep, and other means were tried. The uncomfortable straight-back stalls in the nave represent the postmedieval solution. More elusive, perhaps, is the symbology of the many white balls—ostrich eggs—that are suspended above the silver chandeliers. According to a late-thirteenth-century Egyptian text, ostriches had to keep constant watch over their eggs, for if they were distracted for a moment, the eggs would be spoiled. The eggs thus remind monks once more that giving into sleep threatens their spiritual life.[20]

The dominant message of the scene of Transfiguration, however, involves not sleeping but hearing and seeing God. While the apostles were looking at Jesus transfigured and sanctified by light, a cloud appeared and "a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him'" (MATT. 17:5; also see MARK 9:7; LUKE 9:35). This aural and visual perception of the divine is shared with the two Moses scenes on the east wall above. They, in turn, contextualize and ground the theophanies in the physical spaces of Sinai (fig. 15). At the left, Moses takes off his sandal before a large bush that would have recalled the one just to the east of the apse. The large rock behind him, and especially the two sharp cliffs in the right scene, simulate the cliffs that surround and frame the monastery (figs. 2, 4), as Weitzmann understood.[21] This local contextualization, it may be argued, extended further to the physical space and light of the Sinai church.

LIGHT

In the nave, a single light source is powerfully present during the morning and evening services. At dawn, the sharp, piercing Sinai sun rises above the low hills east of the monastery until it shines through the double windows at the back of the church. Then intense shafts of light begin to illumine the dark nave, as the monks and pilgrims gather for matins and the liturgy (fig. 21). Through identical double windows, piercing light floods the nave for a few minutes in the late afternoon while monks chant the vespers antiphonally with other fathers across the narrow nave (fig. 22). The western light is unencumbered by objects or visual commentary, but the dawn's first rays stream past the crucifix, iconostasis, and ostrich eggs. Since the erection of the church in the sixth century, this beam of light has corresponded to the diagonal axis of the two Moses scenes at the top of the east wall and to the direction of God's hand twice depicted there (fig. 23).

This visualization of God's intervention does not have the same necessity in the two Moses panels. For the right scene, the narrative requires that God be shown delivering the tablets from above. However, when Moses takes off his sandals, he does so in response not to a voice from on high but to a command emanating from the bush before him. Thus, the hand of God in the left mosaic at best is redundant or at worst contradicts the biblical account and the reason the monastery exists, namely the Burning Bush. For that reason, an early-thirteenth-century icon (cat. no. 51), perhaps painted at the monastery, omits the hand of God and thereby more accurately depicts the prophet looking toward the large red bush in front of him.

Closer attention to the physical setting of the two Moses scenes resolves the contradiction. By their placement, both sacralize the early-morning light and merge the voice of God, represented by the extended hand, with the actual light of the window. This visual commentary on light finds support in Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*. At the miracle of the Burning Bush, according to Gregory, both seeing and hearing were "illuminated by the rays of light," and "the light's grace was distributed to both senses."[22] Not ordinary illumination but truth and grace came from the bush and from the fire and smoke of God on Mount Sinai. In the sacred space of the monastery's nave, the mosaics render concrete the metaphor that God is Light, the basic message of both matins and vespers celebrated here every day for centuries.[23]

Though palpably present, the light that comes through the double windows on the east and west ends may not originally have been the only, or symbolically even the most important, in the church. Above both windows are smaller, centered openings at the summit of the gabled ends of the Justinianic church. The western window is cruciform (fig. 24), the eastern circular (fig. 25), and neither can presently be seen from the nave. A post-Byzantine ceiling obscures the sixth-century wooden trusses that support the steep roof. Carbon-14 dating attests to its sixth-century date, as do the names of Emperor Justinian, Empress Theodora, and architect Stephanos that are inscribed on the horizontal beams.[24] Was the roofing structure open from below and were the small windows on the eastern and western walls visible from the nave of the original church, or did the church always have a flat ceiling and a closed attic space?

For the grand church erected over the grave of Christ in Jerusalem, Emperor Constantine the Great expressed his willingness to pay for a gold coffered ceiling,[25] but whether truss roofs in more modest churches like Saint Catherine's were open from below or closed by a wooden ceiling cannot be definitively resolved, because the Sinai roof is unique and predates other surviving examples by centuries.[26] George Forsyth proposed that originally a flat ceiling was

Figure 21 (opposite): Matins. Light beginning. Photo: Robert S. Nelson.

Figure 22 (above left) Monks chanting at vespers. Photo: Robert S. Nelson.

Figure 23 (above right) Mosaic with Moses untying his sandal and light coming through the window. Photo: Robert S. Nelson.

laid between these beams, so as not to obscure the inscriptions.[27] Patrik Reuterswärd assumed that the uppermost windows could be seen from the nave.[28] The form and effect of these windows supports the latter position. The cruciform window of the west facade (fig. 24) is carefully framed and flanked by palm trees, symbols of paradise that had local referents as well, and would have directed a cross-shaped beam of light into the nave at vespers, a service at which divine light is celebrated, as will be discussed shortly.

The corresponding window on the east is circular. Its meaning would be ambiguous, were it not for its position on the east wall and the general sense of eastern light in early Christianity. From an early date, morning light was associated with the divine. In the third century, the Alexandrian theologian Origen made reference to the custom of praying to the east, so as to face "where the true light rises."[29] Early medieval apse decorations made reference to this direction and time from the brilliant red clouds of dawn at the sixth-century apse of the church of Saints Cosmas and Damian in Rome[30] to the pre-Iconoclastic apse of the now-destroyed church of the Koimesis in Nicaea (fig. 26). There, from a segment of heaven, three rays of light project downward. The central one with the hand of God extends to the Virgin and Child in a manner that recalls the upper ray that connects Jesus in the Sinai apse to medallions of a cross and the Lamb of God above. Between the symbolic heaven and earth of the Nicaean apse is a verse from Psalms (109:3) that voices the hand of God and defines the time of day: "I have begotten thee from the womb before the morning."[31]

Figure 24 (opposite, top left) West end of the church. Photo: Bruce White.

Figure 25 (opposite, top right) East end of the church. Photo: Robert S. Nelson.

Figure 26 (opposite, bottom) Apse mosaic (destroyed) with Mother of God. Church of the Koimesis, Nicaea (Iznik), Turkey. (After Schlumberger)

At the eastern end of the Sinai church, light, both real and depicted, is the central theme. The apse mosaic forcefully renders present the brilliant light that changed the figure of Christ and, radiating outward, caused his divinity to be known to the three disciples and to all who see the mosaic. The white beams projecting from Jesus are traditional but also call to mind the

shafts of early morning light in the church (figs. 21, 23). The vertical axis of the apse presents an important theological hierarchy from a medallion with the prophet David in the lower border of the mosaic, through the transfigured Jesus and the ray above him, to the gold cross in the medallion and the Lamb of God on the wall, past the double windows, and ending in the circular window presently visible only on the exterior (fig. 25). In both mosaics at the top of the wall, Moses looks to the hand of God in a segment of heaven, represented as coming from a point in between and above both panels, a position that more or less coincides with a source of actual light. As the highest window on the east wall, it would be the first to catch the morning rays and to illumine the imperial inscriptions on the wooden tie beams high above the nave, and thus it would have greater visual prominence than the lower double windows (figs. 21, 25). The heretofore unnoticed circular window thus becomes the place where mosaic, building, space, light, and liturgy come together.

The play of morning light in the church does not end with the first rays of the day. When the sun rises higher into the sky, the lowest windows on the east wall gradually illumine the bema and altar (fig. 27). While the nave is still dark and candles still lit, the initial shafts of light strike the altar, silhouetting the liturgical objects (fig. 28). Slowly altar, clergy, and their glorious vestments emerge from the dark, and the gold embroidery of the altar covering glistens in the morning

Figure 27 (opposite)
Altar as dawn breaks. Photo: Robert S. Nelson.

Figure 28 (above)
Light and liturgical objects seen through the iconostasis door. Photo: Robert S. Nelson.

light (fig. 29). The sharp rays of the desert intensify until the entire bema is saturated with strong light (fig. 30) that reflects off the marble walls and metallic objects and illumines portions of the apse mosaic (fig. 31). Poetic, mystical, or spiritual—depending on one's sensibility—the changing natural light in the church is stunning and unforgettable.

Many or most rites, however, take place at night, necessitating artificial light. Since antiquity, Byzantine churches have been equipped with valuable inventories of lighting devices. Before the legalization of Christianity in 313, private house churches were equipped with lamps, torches, and candlesticks.[32] Afterward, when worship became more public and ceremonial, grander and more numerous means of illumination were required. The emperor Constantine the Great met those needs. To the cathedral of Rome, the church of Saint John Lateran, he gave candelabra, chandeliers, and lamps made of gold, silver, and bronze and designated specific endowments to pay for their maintenance.[33] That expense could be significant, as much as a third of a church's income, according to a sixth-century source.[34] In an average early Byzantine church, lamps of various sorts greatly outnumbered liturgical vessels for the altar.[35]

Figure 29 (right)
Priest and deacon at the altar
Photo: Robert S. Nelson

Figure 30 (opposite)
Altar in full light
Photo: Robert S. Nelson

Figure 31
Apse mosaic in the early morning light. Photo: Robert S. Nelson.

Many lighting devices in the early period took the form of polycandela, flat openwork frames that held small glass lamps and were suspended from long chains. Dumbarton Oaks possesses beautiful sixth-century examples in silver,[36] but Justinian's great church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople was once equipped with even grander versions, to judge from contemporary descriptions. A ring of polycandela hung from the cornice of its vast dome, and single lamps hung from the arches of the side aisles in a manner similar to that in a miniature in the early Arabic Gospel book shown here (see cat. no. 32, page 200).[37] Minus the upper story, the church depicted there resembles the Sinai basilica.

Justinian may well have provided lighting devices for his foundation in the Sinai, but if he did, they have been lost. Yet the monastery does preserve a rare example of a later Byzantine candelabrum (cat. no. 39), as well as a pair of Islamic lamp stands (one of which is cat. no. 40). The latter's formulaic Arabic inscriptions are standard for the period and do not compromise the religious function of the object. Such a lamp stand could have been donated by a pious pilgrim or purchased by the monastery at a Cairo market.

Floor lights are attested from the early Byzantine period, and the two in the exhibition represent a continuation of that earlier tradition with updated ornament. Both are similar in height to a sixth-century lamp or candle stand now in Virginia[38] and, like it, rest on a base with three feet. The articulation and decoration of the shafts differ, however. The visually striking Byzantine candelabrum has a more sculptural shaft, embellished with medallion portraits of military saints. Its circular collar of candles made a strong light source, and the holy warriors, religious icons as much as any other in the exhibition, symbolically protected the light and the icons it illumined. In the exhibition, both floor lights stand before the icons on the chancel barrier like later versions at the monastery (fig. 9). Presently the monks also move portable wooden versions around to light vesper readings in the center of the nave (fig. 11).

Artificial light did more than make vigils possible; in an ecclesiastical context, light was a part of the celebration and manifestation of the divine. The notion that "God is light" (1 JOHN 1:5) appears several times in the Christian scriptures. John's Gospel opens with the praise of the Word, but also the Light and the life that "was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (JOHN 1:4–5). A few chapters later Jesus proclaims, "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (JOHN 8:12). A similar message follows: "I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness" (JOHN 12:46).[39]

The symbolism and actuality of light became an integral part of liturgical services in the first centuries of Christianity. In the Nicene Creed, for example, Christians affirm that Jesus is "God from God, light from light . . . of one being with the father." The well-known Hymn of Light, already traditional in the late fourth century according to Saint Basil, was addressed to "O Joyful Light." Sung ever since in the vespers of the Byzantine and other rites, the hymn ritually transforms both the natural light at the end of the day and the artificial light kindled in the church into the "light of the world," Jesus Christ.[40] For that reason, Symeon of Thessaloniki could write in the fifteenth century that in church "divine illumination is bestowed by lighting the lamps."[41]

The light in the medieval church was constantly changing. We take artificial lighting for granted, but stable and safe nocturnal illumination is only a little over a century old.[42] Before gas and electric lights, people perceived and managed night in ways difficult for us to imagine.[43] Candles and lamps had to be continually tended and replenished. Managing lighting became a part of the dramaturgy of the liturgy and anticipated the variable lighting of modern theater. The illumination of a church varied within the service and across the church calendar. For example, according to the same Symeon, while the lection from Genesis is read from the pulpit at vespers,

> two portable candlesticks—or more if a bishop is present—and the censer are prepared in the sanctuary. . . . When the Genesis reading is finished, the deacon or priest appears immediately with the lights, the Royal Doors [the central doors of the chancel barrier] being open and all standing. In the middle of the church he makes the sign of the cross with the censer intoning: "Wisdom arise!

Figure 32 (above left) Father John Alipheris lighting candles. Photo: Robert S. Nelson.

Figure 33 (above right) Church fully lit with candles and lamps for Easter. Photo: Robert S. Nelson.

> The light of Christ shines upon all." . . . Then the lector on the Ambon reads the lection from Proverbs, and the usual lights in the church are lit. This signifies that at the end of the age the true light, Jesus Christ in flesh, has shone upon us who sit in darkness and filled the world with the grace of his light. This is why at the end of Vespers we say: "For thou art our illumination, O Christ our God."[44]

In large, well-endowed churches, artificial lighting was important to patrons and beholders, hence its mention in medieval sources. The effects could be dazzling. Justinian's Great Church in Constantinople was said to be filled with a "nocturnal sun" during the evening services.[45] At the vigil for the feast of the Ascension at a church in Jerusalem, according to a seventh-century source, the polycandela provided "a terrible and wondrous gleaming" that poured out of the windows and made the church seem to be on fire.[46] The charter of the imperial Pantocrator monastery in twelfth-century Constantinople discussed the lighting of its main church in some detail.[47] Ever-burning candles were placed before images in the main apse of the Pantocrator, the Crucifixion, and the Anastasis (Descent into Hades), and before the Washing of the Feet and the Last Supper in side chapels. During services lamps and candles on their tall stands were lit in other parts of the church, but the focus remained on the altar area, creating a hierarchy of image and place. The areas where the liturgy was celebrated and God was made manifest were the best lit, confirming the association of light and the divine.

The direct experience of attending solemn vigils at great churches in the Middle Ages is not available to us, but the monks of Saint Catherine's monastery do continue tradition, and the spatial context of their liturgies is the Justinianic church. While rituals have changed since the Middle Ages, their present performance can give some sense of the past known only through texts and works of art. Before vespers began in Holy Week 2005, Father John Alipheris, the monk in charge of the lights, busied himself lighting the larger chandeliers (fig. 32). During the service, he continued to light and extinguish candles in various parts of the

church, according to local customs similar to the staging described by Symeon of Thessaloniki. All the lamps and candles are lit for the great feast days of the year (fig. 33), but even a few candles create warm, embracing light and a comforting bulwark against the deep darkness of outlying spaces and the high ceiling overhead. At Easter, the processions of priests and deacons created a movable feast of light (see fig. 35), so different from the cold, hard, uniform illumination of modern fluorescent fixtures. In the long exposures of the camera, candle flames flicker and become balls of yellow, and the tapers carried in procession by priests and deacons turn into long streaks across the photograph.

Icons are made for and by this light. In the flickering light of candles, they sparkle and come alive, reflecting the light before them, much like the burnished back plate of a silver wall sconce. The transformed light, mingled with the images of saints or religious scenes, affected the medieval beholder. According to Symeon of Thessaloniki, "by seeing the saints and their beauty and through the light of the divine lights [lamps and tapers] our sight becomes bright and holy and we shine within."[48]

At the monastery, the effects of light and darkness may be observed in the right aisle of the church, where three icons of the Deesis group—Mary, Christ, and John the Baptist—are customarily displayed. In a photograph made in the morning (fig. 34), two icons (cat. nos. 24–25) have been removed for study. The supplications of John the Baptist on the remaining icon accompany the prayers of the monk standing below. During the day, much in the church

Figure 34 (right)
Monk at morning prayer beside icon of John the Baptist. Photo: Robert S. Nelson.

Figure 35 (following pages)
Easter procession from the bema. Photo: Robert S. Nelson.

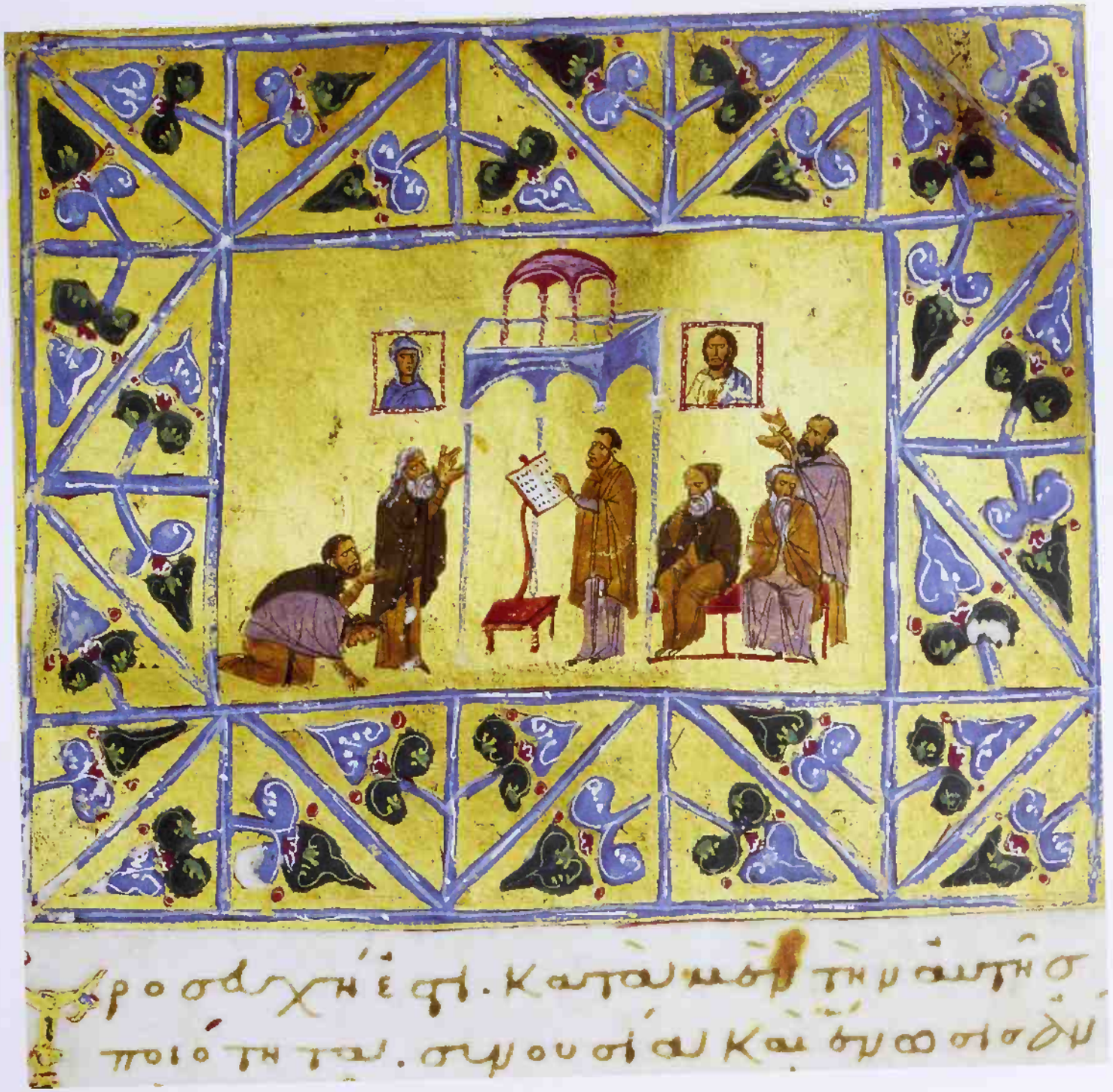


Figure 36 (opposite)
Monks praying at Christmas vigil beneath the three icons of the Deesis group. Photo: Robert S. Nelson.

Figure 37 (above)
Miniature with monks praying and reading before templon and ciborium. In *The Heavenly Ladder* of Saint John Climacus, twelfth century. Sinai cod. 418 (cat. no. 33), fol. 269r.

Figure 38
Close-up of Menologion icon for November, by candlelight. The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, Egypt. Photo: Robert S. Nelson.

attracts the viewer's eye, but at night (fig. 36) the dark obscures all not graced by lamp or candle. The monks and their dark garments fade into the night, and the three icons become the center of attention in this corner of the church. Their gold grounds catch the lamp light, and for a moment figure and ground reverse (see fig. 38).

In the nocturnal light of church vigils, the gold of icons does not so much flatten as enliven. Theologically, icons are the representations of holy persons that are absent; the icons are not holy themselves and thus are not idols. But in the nocturnal light, gold-ground icons make the holy powerfully manifest. Their dazzling radiance closes off the panel and returns the light and image of the saint to the viewer with renewed intensity. In the Renaissance and later periods in western European art, persons portrayed were placed in a room or before a landscape (cat. no. 61), and by implication, such images must have been made to be seen in adequately lit spaces during the day. To that aesthetic, a gold ground appeared primitive and without function. Modern artists and critics appreciated the gold ground as an apparent precedent for flat abstract paintings of the twentieth century, but they too misread the panels and applied to these past objects their present conditions of viewing, the abundant natural—and later artificial—light that the modern museum brings to the artwork.

What gave icons their power and efficacy in spaces of devotion was a set of beliefs and assumptions, a theology of the icon, that the Eastern Church hammered out after much discussion and no little turmoil during a period of Iconoclasm in the eighth and ninth centuries. In its aftermath, it was agreed that Saint Basil had long before properly defined the nature of icon veneration: "The honor [shown] to a holy image is conveyed to its prototype" or what it represents.[49]

An epigram from the *Greek Anthology* about an image of Saint Michael explains how this worked in practice:

> The mortal man who beholds the image directs his mind to a higher contemplation. His veneration is no longer distracted: engraving within himself the [archangel's] traits, he trembles as if he were in the latter's presence. The eyes encourage deep thoughts and art is able by means of colors to ferry over [to its object] the prayer of the mind.[50]

A second basic doctrine of icon veneration in the Middle Ages was prescribed by the Seventh Ecumenical Council, which reinstated religious images in 787:

> The making of icons is not the invention of painters, but [expresses] the approved legislation of the Catholic Church. . . . The conception and the tradition are therefore theirs and not of the painter; for the painter's domain is limited to his art, whereas the disposition manifestly pertains to the Holy Fathers.[51]

In practice this meant that the subject matter of an icon verged on dogma, but its execution was left to trained artists. Byzantine icons may thus appear conventional and traditional, even when innovative and original, but all strive on their own terms for aesthetic beauty and visual power. Icon veneration was predicated on a long-standing understanding in the Greek East that the visible and earthly could lead to the invisible and the heavenly. Lacking the distrust of the natural world of other cultures, the faithful prayed with eyes open before icons (fig. 37), not with heads bowed and eyes closed, as depicted and practiced later in western Europe and North America, where vision itself has been denigrated in some quarters.[52]

EXHIBITION

The foregoing has suggested the physical context of past and present icon devotion at the monastery. Our exhibition of icons from that distant community explores the interrelated themes of holy image, holy space, and holy site—in three parts. The first part focuses on the nature of icons, led by the majestic sixth-century icon of Saint Peter. Displayed also are two other early encaustic icons removed from Saint Catherine's in the nineteenth century (presently in the collection of the Bohdan and Varvara Khanenko Museum of Arts in Kiev). This unprecedented display brings together three of the five earliest icons in existence (cat. nos. 1–3) and has occasioned the essay herein by Thomas Mathews about the ancient origins of such panels. Early icons are found at the monastery because the Sinai was no longer part of the Byzantine Empire after the Islamic conquests of the seventh century; hence it was not subject to the imperial-sponsored Iconoclasm that destroyed much of early Byzantine religious art. Thus also survive an icon of the Ascension, painted for Saint Catherine's in a local variant of a Syro-Palestinian style (cat. no. 5); and one of the earliest depictions of Christ dead on the cross (cat. no. 4), the subject that eventually led to the crucifixes of the late Middle Ages and the present day.

After Iconoclasm, icons quickly regained their former social prestige and religious power, as shown by wings of a triptych mounted together (cat. no. 6). The missing center was the Mandylion, the miraculous image of Christ not made by human hands and a much prized icon and relic of tenth-century Constantinople. The stunning images of holy figures in the Codex Theodosianus (cat. no. 7), illuminated a few decades later, remind us that an icon was not only a wood panel, its general meaning today, but any picture in devotional use, from an apse

mosaic (fig. 15) to the medallions on a candelabrum (cat. no. 39). Father Justin, an American monk long resident at Saint Catherine's, provides a unique perspective in his essay, herein, on the luxurious Codex Theodosianus.

Icons of the Virgin and Child were particularly celebrated in Byzantium and followed well-established models (cat. nos. 8–9). Thus, the large mosaic icon of the Virgin Hodegetria ("pointing the way") and the smaller panel with embossed background both copy a venerable icon in Constantinople. The media chosen and the small variations in the pose of mother and child belong to what the Seventh Ecumenical Council termed "the painter's domain" and reveal local style and content. The painters, for example, expressed differing notions about the Mother of God through subtle distinctions in the psychological interaction of the Virgin and Child.

Every icon was enveloped in language, words written on its field or frame and words spoken in its presence. Inscriptions, often prominent, identified holy figures even if an image of Mary with her infant, for example, could scarcely be mistaken for that of a less exalted female saint. Pious beholders prayed to icons and believed that they or, more properly, their prototypes answered back. Icons record the pleas of Stephen, the painter or patron of the two large icons of Elijah and Moses (cat. nos. 28, 29), and a hymn to the Virgin, written on the frame of the icon of the Patriarch of Jerusalem (cat. no. 53).

Texts on icons link the saints depicted with their beholders. For example, John the Baptist on a unique icon gestures to Christ above and displays a scroll with the standard inscription addressed to the viewer, "Behold the Lamb of God . . ." (cat. no. 10). The text inscribed between the saint and Jesus speaks for the Baptist's severed head below. It addresses Jesus and asks that he grant salvation to the living—that is, the pious and literate patron and beholder, who prays to John for intercessions by means of this icon.

In the nave of a church, changing displays of icons presented the principal events in the life of the church. Icons of these great feasts are well represented in this exhibition—from an icon of the Annunciation, a late-twelfth-century masterpiece (cat. no. 13), through the Nativity (cat. no. 14) and Crucifixion (cat. no. 15). A large polyptych of the traditional twelve feasts plus events of Holy Week provided a monastic chapel with the basic icons for the church year (cat. no. 18). Particular combinations for special occasions were also possible. Thus a diptych joins the Virgin Hodegetria to the Descent from the Cross, most likely for display on Good Friday (cat. no. 19).

Icons define and create holy space, the second theme of this exhibition and the focus of the objects on or near the reconstructed templon. The liturgical objects on the altar provide some sense of the rich church treasure that the monastery must have enjoyed from its Justinianic foundation. None of its medieval church silver survives, so it is fortunate that the Byzantine Collection of Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C., has loaned three of its greatest treasures, a sixth-century chalice, a paten, and a liturgical fan, or rhipidion (cat. nos. 36–38). They are joined by a bronze cross that is monetarily, but not aesthetically, less valuable. Its chief glory is the delicately incised vignettes of Moses on the cross arms and two hands of God emerging from a starry heaven (cat. no. 35) at the top. Nearby hangs something else used in this area, a priest's stole from the late Middle Ages (cat. no. 41). Its feast scenes define the principal occasions in which this elaborate embroidery would have been worn and seen. Also displayed in this section are narrow icons of the Saints Basil and John Chrysostom, authors of the two principal liturgies. These panels may have decorated the apse of the main church or one of its chapels and offered models of learning and devotion for the celebrants of the liturgy (cat. nos. 26–27).

Dominating this portion of *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground* is the reconstructed chancel barrier, or templon, that separates the bema reserved for the clergy from the nave of the laity. From the tenth and eleventh centuries on, the templon became a setting for more and more icons. First, feast scenes were added to the narrow entablature, as seen in the monastery's earliest and largest templon beam, from the twelfth century (cat. no. 20). The smaller beam with scenes of the life of Saint Eustratios was presumably designed for a chapel dedicated to that saint (cat. no. 21). In later centuries, icons began to be inserted between the columns that supported the entablature. Two icons, of Mary and of Jesus (cat. nos. 24, 25), are part of a group of three known as the Deesis, a frequent subject at the center of templon programs, as seen on the Eustratios beam. The John the Baptist panel of that Deesis group was not well enough preserved to exhibit, so the icons of the Virgin and Christ have been arranged according to the depiction of the chancel barrier and liturgy in a Sinai manuscript (fig. 37; cat. no. 33). The Deesis, combined with the four evangelists, also appears at the beginning of a Gospel lectionary meant to be read before the templon (cat. no. 34). Decorated chancel doors would have completed the ensemble, and two pairs are in this exhibiton, one depicting the Annunciation (cat. no. 22)—the most common subject for chancel doors—and the other depicting the expressive figures of Moses and Aaron (cat. no. 23), who are especially appropriate for the monastery.

Icons also appear elsewhere in the main church of Saint Catherine's. For some years, the monumental icons of Moses and Elijah (cat. nos. 29, 28), the prophets most closely associated with Mount Sinai, have hung on the side walls of the nave (fig. 12), as evoked in the exhibition, but a sixteenth-century source put them on the east wall of the porch, where they would have anticipated the imagery inside. Also part of the permanent church decoration of the church are the calendar icons that have been attached to columns in the nave since at least the fifteenth century (cat. no. 31). Presently the monks mark the passage of time by lighting a candle before the icon of the month (see fig. 38), thus venerating the saints of that month and sacralizing time as well as space in the nave.

The last section in this exhibition, "Holy Site," opens and closes with images of the hallowed grounds of the monastery—from a fascinating, if late and folkloric, view of the Sinai (cat. no. 43) to scenes of monastic life by the Cretan painter Georgios Klontzas (cat. no. 42) and El Greco's stunningly dramatic vision of the Sinai on a triptych from the Galleria Estense in Modena (cat. no. 61). A large icon of the saints Sergius and Bacchus (cat. no. 50) introduces the issues broached in this section. Dressed as crusading knights, the two saints suggest the presence of foreign pilgrims at the monastery, and the panel itself underscores the art-historical complexities of this material. What was only recently exhibited as the work of a Latin Crusader painter has lately been assigned to a Syrian artist. Another indication of the cosmopolitan and multilingual nature of the community of monks and pilgrims are two Arabic manuscripts, the earliest dated translation of the Gospels (cat. no. 32) and a copy of the *Heavenly Ladder* of Saint John Climacus (cat. no. 49). Many works of foreign derivation were likely gifts to the monastery, as is well documented for the large Gothic Saint Catherine (cat. no. 57), commissioned in 1387 by the Catalan consul in Damascus. In his essay herein, David Jacoby discusses pilgrimages to the monastery and the larger context of such gifts.

Several works in this last section illustrate and address monastic audiences. At the beginning of a copy of the sermons of Gregory Nazianzenus, itself a twelfth-century donation to a monastery near Constantinople (cat. no. 45), an elaborate monastic setting surrounds the author. Here Saint Gregory is dressed as a monk, not a bishop as customary. The same habit appears on Saint Macarius, shown with a cherub in an unusual icon that is an allegory of

monasticism (cat. no. 44). The bust portraits of Saint Theodosia—a fierce opponent of Iconoclasm—and the monastery's former abbot, Saint John Climacus, similarly represent models of the devout life (cat. nos. 46–47). Finally, the small, elegant icon of the Heavenly Ladder and its many demons would have reminded its monastic beholders of the literal pitfalls on the way to salvation.

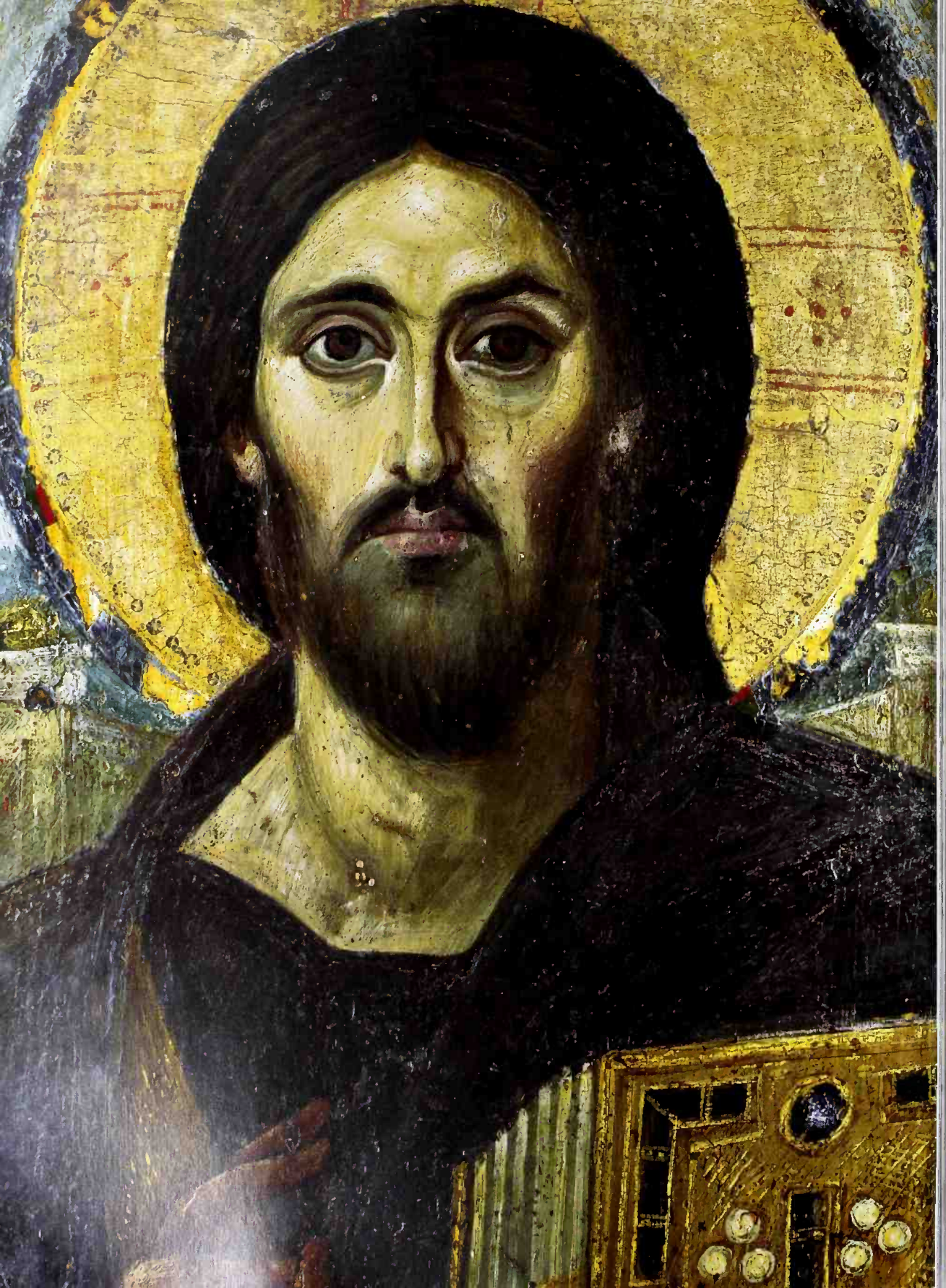
Other icons in this section document the patron saints of the monastery, the subject of Kristen M. Collins's essay herein. Dedicated initially to the Virgin, the monastery was naturally focused as well on Moses. The patriarch of Jerusalem, Euthymios II, prays to both in an icon executed after his death by the local painter Peter (cat. no. 53). Equally visionary is the small panel of Moses turning toward the Virgin and Child and addressing them (cat. no. 52), one of a number of panels with similar subject matter. Moses appears yet again in a larger icon, removing his sandal before a fiery bush. In the bottom left corner of the frame, a small turbaned figure kneels beneath Moses' bare right foot, much like the monk Pimen before Saint George (cat. no. 16).

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the cult of Saint Catherine intensified at the monastery. In the well-known icon with scenes of her life (cat. no. 55), Catherine appears dressed as a Byzantine empress in the manner of the portrait of the actual Empress Irene in an icon of local significance (cat. no. 54). That Byzantine iconographic tradition begins to weaken in an icon of Catherine and the Virgin of the Burning Bush (cat. no. 56) and disappears by the fourteenth-century date of an icon donated by the Catalan consul in Damascus (cat. no. 57). That cult of Catherine spread to the West, as shown by the large altarpiece from the J. Paul Getty Museum collection (cat. no. 60), but at the Sinai monastery she never supplanted the Virgin of the Burning Bush, so that scenes of both command the center of a sixteenth-century triptych (cat. no. 58), and the Virgin dominates a dramatic and intricate icon by the Cretan artist Michael Damaskenos (cat. no. 59).

Holy Image, Hallowed Ground concludes with El Greco's remarkable vision of God bestowing the Ten Commandments atop Mount Sinai (cat. no. 61). Now, the monastery and its hallowed ground become something visualized, not experienced. Unlike the painter of that humble but detailed topography from the eighteenth century (cat. no. 43), El Greco never saw the deserts of Sinai. For some critics, the change was salutary: "In the Modena triptych the painter begins to emancipate himself from the spaceless strait-jacket of the gold ground to a more atmospheric dark red and brown."[53] But that so-called straitjacket, the theology of the icon, and the orchestration of light and icons in physical spaces had once conveyed the presence rather than the representation of the divine. Something was lost as well as gained, therefore, when this great painter migrated to the West and firmly placed the Sinai in an increasingly secular landscape tradition that survives to the present in the photographs that begin this essay.

NOTES

1. On the climate and geology of the Sinai, see Dahari 2000, pp. 3–6. I am grateful to Jaś Elsner for his comments on this essay.
2. Wilkinson 1981, p. 91.
3. Wilkinson 1981, pp. 93–95. The stairs may be dated by the epigraphy of an inscription on the second of the two arches: I. Ševčenko 1966, pp. 257, 263.
4. Wilkinson 1981, p. 96.
5. See Thomas F. Mathews, "Early Icons of the Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine at Sinai," herein, and Forsyth 1968, p. 4
6. When this occurred is debated. Peter Grossman, the most recent archaeologist to study the church, suggests that the addition is from the late sixth or early seventh century: P. Grossman 1988, pp. 555–56.
7. These inscriptions of entry are published in I. Ševčenko 1966, p. 262, and discussed in Coleman and Elsner 1994, pp. 78–79
8. Rabino 1938, p. 20.
9. Some pilgrims would also have seen a mosaic, apparently placed over the narthex door that leads into the church. It represented the Virgin and Child flanked by Saint Catherine and Moses, according to the fourteenth-century traveler Niccolò da Poggibonsi. See Braun 1973, p. 292. Such iconography would most likely be no earlier than the flourishing of the Catherine cult at the monastery in the thirteenth century. On the latter see the essays of David Jacoby, "Christian Pilgrimage to Sinai until the Late Fifteenth Century," and Kristen M. Collins, "Visual Piety and Institutional Identity at Sinai," herein.
10. Forsyth and Weitzmann 1973, pls. 84–86.
11. Most of this upper ray presently consists of painted yellow cubes that restore losses in this area, but a small patch of original ray survives. Its irregular pattern of gold and silver cubes is identical to that of the other rays and thus originally was the same color. For allowing me to study the mosaic at close range, I am grateful to its restorers, Elena Macchia, Raffaele Laera, and Poteto Maselli.
12. Malherbe and Ferguson 1978, p. 59; Elsner 1994, p. 90. On the mosaic, more recently, see Andreopoulos 2002.
13. Elsner 1994, p. 92.
14. Elsner 1994, pp. 97–98.
15. Alexander Kazhdan and Robert S. Nelson in *ODB*, s.v. "John Klimax."
16. Robert F. Taft in *ODB*, s.v. "Vigil."
17. Elsner 1994, p. 95.
18. Luibheid and Russell 1982, p. 194.
19. Luibheid and Russell 1982, p. 196.
20. Galavaris 1978b, pp. 74–75. Egyptian monks today understand the eggs to be symbols of the Resurrection.
21. Weitzmann in Forsyth and Weitzmann 1973, p. 14.
22. Malherbe and Ferguson 1978, p. 35.
23. Robert F. Taft in *ODB*, s.v. "Vespers."
24. Forsyth 1968, pp. 8–9.
25. C. Mango 1972, p. 12. I thank Charles McClendon for advice on this matter.
26. William Loerke in *ODB*, s.v. "Roof."
27. Forsyth and Weitzmann 1973, p. 8.
28. Reutersvärd 1982, p. 96.
29. Origen, quoted in Taft 1983, p. 17.
30. Illustrated in Brandenburg 2004, figs. 134–35.
31. On the church and its inscriptions see Barber 2002, pp. 61–66.
32. Dix 1945, pp. 24–25.
33. Davis 1989, p. 17. Generally on lighting vessels in early churches, see Dendy 1959, pp. 1–16.
34. Dendy 1959, p. 8.
35. Boyd 1988, pp. 197–98. I thank Jaś Elsner for this reference.
36. Boyd and M. M. Mango 1992, figs. 825.1–835.1.
37. C. Mango 1972, p. 90; Isar 2004; L. E. Butler 1992, pp. 75–77. A useful general essay is Theis 2001.
38. Gonosová and Kondoleon 1994, pp. 258–59. Such stands appear to be extended versions of candle or lamp stands for tables, for which see silver versions in M. M. Mango 2003, pp. 64–67.
39. See Taft 1983, pp. 248–49.
40. Taft 1983, pp. 212–13.
41. Galavaris 1978b, p. 72; Symeon of Thessaloniki in *PG*, vol. 155, col. 344.
42. Schivelbusch 1988. I thank my colleague Edward Cooke for this reference.
43. For attitudes toward the night in the early modern period, which may have been little different from those in the Middle Ages, see Ekirch 2005. I thank Kristine Hess for this reference.
44. Simmons 1984, p. 93.
45. Paul the Silentiary: C. Mango 1972, p. 89.
46. Meehan 1983, p. 69, cited in Buckton 1994, p. 107.
47. Analyzed by Congdon 1996.
48. Galavaris 1978b, p. 72.
49. C. Mango 1972, p. 169 (Saint John Damascene, *De fide Orthodoxa* 4.16).
50. C. Mango 1972, p. 115 (*Anthol. graeca* 1.34).
51. C. Mango 1972, p. 172. The best recent art-historical account of Iconoclasm is Barber 2002.
52. Jay 1993.
53. Teuffel 1995, p. 170.



Early Icons of the Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine at Sinai

Thomas F. Mathews

The discovery of the icons at Saint Catherine's monastery was a major event for the history of art. The remoteness of the Sinai monastery had shielded its artistic treasures from the conflicts that despoiled other centers of the Christian East, and over the course of fifteen centuries the monastery had accumulated a collection of incomparable richness. It was particularly the icons of the early period that substantially altered our picture of the development of medieval art. When George and Maria Sotiriou, followed by Kurt Weitzmann, published these panel paintings in the 1950s, they lifted a veil on a phase of painting history that had been virtually unknown.[1] To the extent that Byzantine icons were the eventual source of European panel painting, this discovery had exceptional importance for the history of art.[2] At the same time, the powerful paintings themselves challenged our understanding of the underlying religious phenomena. How and when the cult of icons grew up had been discussed principally on the basis of historical and theological texts; with the Sinai discovery it became possible to argue directly from the physical evidence of a substantial body of icons. As new material, pagan as well as Christian, continues to be brought to light, the present exhibition offers a unique opportunity to review these issues.

Three important aspects of the icon phenomenon seem to emerge more sharply than previously. First, the study of early icons brings us face-to-face with the deep debt of Christian religion to its pagan antecedents. Though the clergy always sought to sharpen the lines that distinguished Christians from their pagan neighbors, both in belief and in behavior, it appears that the religious impulse behind icons, or the impulse to make votive offerings, remained substantially the same. The deep-rooted religious traditions of the Mediterranean world were shared across what we might call denominational boundaries, and in recent years scholarship has focused on pagan antecedents of icons, namely a body of religious panel paintings, chiefly from ancient Egypt, which in construction and composition compare well with the corpus of early Byzantine icons. Dating from the first to the third century, these panel paintings exhibit the ancient divinities in nonnarrative frontal poses, holding symbols of their power, their heads ringed with halos (figs. 40, 47).[3]

Second, the icons speak eloquently of the private piety of the early Christians. Christian worship is most often studied in its public, communal dimension, called the "liturgy." This is the worship that the Christian assembly conducts in the church under the direction of the clergy. The texts of these rites—Baptism, the Eucharist, Holy Orders, and the daily prayers of the Hours—were recorded from earliest times, and their history and theology have been

Figure 39 (opposite)
The Blessing Christ, first half of the sixth century (detail, fig. 50).

studied with meticulous scholarship.[4] But alongside this official worship, Christians also worshipped at home in a more spontaneous and unregulated fashion right from the start.

"When you pray," Christ urges his followers in Matthew's Gospel, "go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret and your Father who sees in secret will reward you," and in this context he gives his disciples the Lord's Prayer (MATT. 6:6).[5] In Egypt in the second quarter of the third century, Origen speaks of a kind of consecrated prayer corner at home. "Any place can be suitable for prayer: it becomes so as soon as someone prays well in it. . . . If we want to pray quietly without being disturbed, we may choose a particular place in our own house, if there is space—a consecrated place, so to speak—and pray there."[6]

This kind of private, lay prayer is less well documented than liturgical worship and has consequently been neglected in scholarship. Icons turn out to be among the most vivid documents of this aspect of Christian life. The furnishing of "consecrated places" at home with icons is attested in historical sources from the second century on and is documented in Egyptian archaeology in the sixth century, both in an elaborate house in Alexandria, known as Kom el-Dikka D, and in the living quarters of the monks at Bawit, Saqqara, and Kellia (fig. 41).[7] Icons are thus shown to be eminently personal objects, situated within the traditional conventions of votive offerings.

Third, private devotion provides a context for situating the extraordinary icons that the emperor Justinian commissioned at his founding of the monastery at Mount Sinai. Modern scholarship always views the piety of the emperor with a skeptical eye, but his religious motives

Figure 40 (below left) Military God, first to third century. Paint on panel. Cabinet des Médailles, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

Figure 41 (below right) Drawing of Enthroned Mother of God with Angels and Donor, sixth century(?). Fresco. Kom el-Dikka, House D, Alexandria, Egypt.

are no more suspect than those of any other Christian—or pagan, for that matter.[8] The modes of piety seem to transcend class and station. Alongside the functions of his official persona we must allow the emperor space for exercises of devotion, and this seems to be especially attested in a set of icons attributable personally to the emperor Justinian, which are the prize of the Sinai collection.

Serious reflection and even theological speculation accompanied all of these developments in the early Byzantine period, giving the subject a spiritual depth and an intellectual complexity not usually credited to this material.

THE CORPUS OF EARLY ICONS

In defining "early," Leo III's edict of 726 that banned the use of icons is generally accepted as the cut-off date.[9] The number of icons before that date is rather limited. Weitzmann counted some thirty-six Sinai panels in this category, including four from Saint Catherine's monastery that are now in Kiev, Ukraine.[10] Another thirty or so can be counted from the rest of Egypt, whether now still in Egypt or held in European collections;[11] and Rome has another four—all of the Mother of God.[12] In other words, the corpus of icons of the early Byzantine period is about seventy pieces, and Saint Catherine's monastery has the largest collection of these.

Some icons are called "Coptic," a term that should designate national Egyptian Christianity, which in the year 451 set out on a course in dogmatic and ecclesiastical opposition to the Byzantine Orthodoxy of Constantinople.[13] But the icon phenomenon transcends the ecclesiastical division, making the term somewhat irrelevant. The fact that icons provoked the bitter violence of Iconoclasm is abundant witness to the powerful place they held in Christian life.

An acute shortage of documentation makes the study of early icons especially difficult. We have no Pliny or Vasari to tell us stories of the painters and their patrons, and no archives survive on which to construct a history. Prior to the intensive discussions that followed the outbreak of Iconoclasm, sources mention icons only rarely and in passing. Only four or five of the surviving icons have inscriptions with clues about their origin. Indeed, the largest body of icon inscriptions, those collected in book 1 of the *Greek Anthology*, refer to icons that are now totally lost, "ghost" icons, so to speak.[14] Nevertheless, a careful sifting of the available evidence yields a more coherent story than might have been expected. Especially important is the cumulative evidence of the corpus of early icons, and in this regard the deposit of icons at Sinai contains critical information about the icon phenomenon as a whole. Logically these larger blocks of evidence should be considered first, after which our focus can be narrowed by degrees to look at single icons and special classes of icons.

The first surprise in the corpus of early icons is their maturity and diversity. Art historians hesitate to assign any icons a date earlier than the sixth century.[15] The Sinai monastery is the earliest surviving repository of icons. Justinian erected the monastery in 548–65. Earlier collections must have existed, as the sophistication of the surviving pieces demonstrates; they are in no way the first faltering steps of a new art genre. Indeed, in their complexity the early icons already anticipate most of the major developments of later icons. Figures are depicted in full-length, half-length, and bust-length form; the saints appear singly, in groups, in registers, or inserted in roundels. Hinged triptychs are common,[16] and examples occur of bilateral icons,[17] icons on book covers,[18] and icons fitted for templon epistyles (see fig. 52; discussed

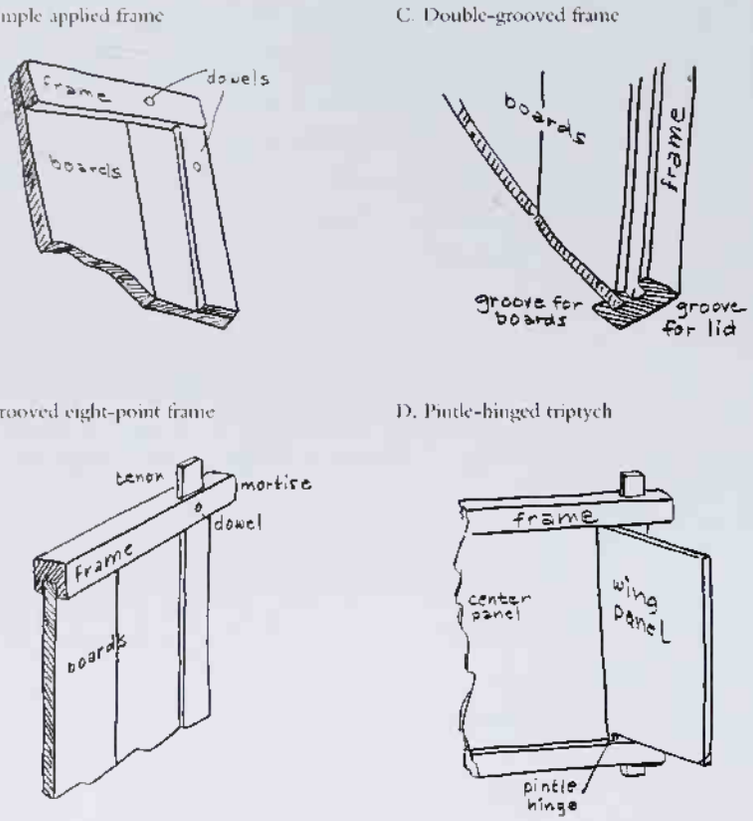


Figure 42 (right) Construction details common to pagan and Christian icons. Drawing by Thomas F. Mathews.

Figure 43 (below) Archangel, sixth century. Paint on panel. Cabinet des Médailles, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (1129b).

later under "From the Private to the Public Sphere"). All of these formats would enjoy wide popularity in middle Byzantine centuries.

Iconmakers built their panels with vertical boards hardly more than a centimeter (half-inch) thick; they fixed these in grooved frames that interlocked at the corners in mortise-and-tenon joints, or they applied frames directly to the face of the boards, fastening them with dowels (fig. 42). They constructed triptychs, which introduced possibilities of concealment and revelation; the wing panels were made to swivel on pintels inserted in ledges above and below the center panel. Although most of the icons range in size from 30 to 50 cm (1 to 1½ ft.), several approach 1 meter. The size of the icon of Santa Maria in Trastevere, at nearly 2 meters, is quite exceptional (fig. 49). It is significant that all of these features of construction are also well documented in the pre-Christian icons that have recently come to light.[19]

The narrative themes are few, but they represent both Old and New Testament events, and the nonnarrative subjects include a wide diversity of sacred figures—from Christ and his mother to angels, apostles, prophets, and saints—representing themes alternately remote and solemn, tender and reassuring, ascetic and severe. To convey this gamut of themes, the artists employed an impressive array of techniques, including flat washes of tempera, glowing layers of encaustic, and passages of brilliant gold, whether applied in leaf or painted in delicate graphic patterns.[20] Their execution

ranged from summary linear sketches to carefully constructed paintings of powerful presence—worthy of a Frans Hals (see fig. 43 and cat. no. 1).

Analyzing the icons from the point of view of style, commentators have found a wide diversity of effects as they try to distinguish Constantinopolitan from Palestinian from Egyptian paintings.[21] However strictly or loosely such "schools" can be established in the corpus, the obvious diversity witnesses a great many different constituencies involved in the "icon phenomenon." It is clear that the icon was not a new invention in the sixth century. Such painting had already developed and diversified over a wide geographical base as it emerged from and gradually distinguished itself from its pagan antecedents.

THE PHENOMENON OF VOTIVE OFFERINGS

The most fundamental problem posed by early icons is defining the genre or class of objects to which they belong. *Icon* is a modern art-historical term, introduced in the nineteenth century, designating a painting of a sacred subject on a wood panel intended for veneration, and it carries some cumbersome Christian baggage.[22] In early Byzantine times people referred to the paintings simply as *eikon*, the Greek word from which *icon* derives, but this is even less useful, for it means "image" in the widest sense, painted or sculpted, or even a mental or verbal representation. Much of the literature on the subject starts with the assumption that icons are a new category of art, an artistic innovation designed specifically for Christian cultic needs. But the earliest historical references to Christian icons imply the opposite. They all refer to the Christian icons as parallel to a well-established pagan religious use of painted panels, and they often describe a usage close to the pagan practice of votive offerings. This is a connection that has not yet been adequately examined.

The first account of a Christian icon is a lively story in the apocryphal Acts of John.[23] Pieter Lalleman has assigned it a date in the second quarter of the second century and has proposed a provenance from Smyrna in Asia Minor in the docetic ambiance in which the canonical Epistles of John were composed.[24] To summarize the narrative, the story tells that a certain Lycomedes, prefect of Ephesus, and his spouse, Cleopatra, fell victims of an evil eye and died, and John raised them from the dead. Lycomedes's spontaneous reaction was to have a painting made of Saint John, which he proceeded to venerate in his bedroom with candles, garlands, and incense. The parallel with pagan practice was recognized by the apostle himself in the story. "Is this one of your gods?" asked John. "You are still living like a pagan."

The document thus bears double witness, first to a Christian use of icons, and second to a similar, established pagan tradition of venerating savior gods with panel paintings. The Christian use, moreover, is not really condemned; John does not require the destruction of the icon. Instead he calls for a mirror to confirm the likeness of his portrait, validating the icon. Further, he allegorizes the icon by offering an anagogical interpretation, saying that Jesus is the true painter, who paints the souls of the faithful with colors, namely the virtues. Hence icons were already regarded as capable of carrying a Christian spiritual meaning.

The offering of an image in response to a cure—and resurrection from the dead is certainly the most dramatic of cures—is one form of votive response, and the Sinai collection as a whole can be seen as a compilation of votive offerings deposited individually for a variety of reasons. The radical disparity of the early Sinai collection is in itself significant evidence of this: among the early icons there are no matching sets or even matching pairs. The measurements are all different and the subjects seemingly random; for example, there is no sequence of the twelve apostles or feasts, as occurs later. What this means is that the icons were not commis-

sioned to fit into some architectural unit like an icon screen or to decorate a chapel with a certain program but were deposited at the monastery one at a time by different individuals. This is in perfect keeping with what is known in antiquity as the "phenomenon of votive offerings." This is the process by which the temples of the Graeco-Roman world accumulated their vast art treasures. War booty, athletic victory prizes, marble and bronze sculptures, paintings, and even humble terracotta figurines were left by the devout as part of a pious exchange with the gods, and they were left singly by different individuals.

The term *votive* can be used in a variety of ways, but strictly speaking it refers to a religious practice defined in a classic study by William Rouse.[25] This practice was constructed as an exchange between gods and humans, mediated by the votive offering. Rouse insists that the votive offering, properly speaking, was freely made, not a duty or an obligation of one's official position. The occasions for making these dedications were various, and Rouse describes eight or nine situations or moments in which a person might experience the gods' intervention and feel the need to respond, such as after a plentiful harvest, victory in war or in the Olympic Games, deliverance from sickness or calamity, election to civic office or receiving a civic honor. For instance, when Augustus on a military campaign narrowly escapes a bolt of lightning that kills his servant, he responds by the consecration of a temple dedicated to Jupiter Tonans, the thundering god, presumably containing a statue of Jupiter with the traditional thunderbolt in his raised right hand. The temple and its image thus become Augustus's way of responding to the god's address.

The votive response could take many forms. After a plentiful harvest one might offer a portion of the earth's bounty; after a victory one might offer the spoils of war. But in every situation the most natural offering, according to Rouse, was an image of the god.[26] Hence votive offerings were one of the major occasions for commissioning monuments, and the temples that were repositories for such offerings became veritable treasuries or museums. Inscriptions sometimes accompanied these dedications to specify the donor's intentions.[27] Typical expressions are "in thanksgiving," "for worship," "for god's favor," "for glory." In return for the offering the donor might ask for health, long life, or good fortune, or the giver could sum it all up in the general abbreviation "ep'agatho" (for the best), a formula very common in Egypt during the second and third centuries.

The traditional place for depositing such votives was the temple, but in late antiquity the situation changed dramatically. In the first place, state patronage of pagan temples declined dramatically in the third century, and domestic shrines played an ever larger role in religious observances.[28] At the same time, the reverse is observable in Christian worship, which in the first centuries was by force of circumstances centered in domestic shrines and only gradually emerged into public "temples." Christian icon worship, accordingly, began in the private, domestic sphere and only gradually made its way into the great churches that began to appear in the fourth century. The Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem became over time a rich repository of votive offerings of great diversity.[29]

In the votive situation, the work of art stood at the center of the dialogue between the gods and human beings: it was at the same time a response to a grace received and a petition for future favors. Many Christian icons can be construed as part of this religious tradition. Two types of historic sources can be invoked on this point: the literary narratives about icons in historical accounts and inscriptions placed on the icons themselves. Both of these sources offer precious evidence.

Writing in the 320s, church historian Eusebius of Caesarea says that he himself has seen in Caesarea Philippi a bronze statue identified as an image of Christ, reputedly offered by the woman whom Christ cured of a hemorrhage (MARK 5: 25–34). He immediately recognizes this offering as an old pagan practice, which reminds him of painted icons he has also encountered. He comments, "It is not at all surprising that Gentiles who long ago received such benefits from our Savior should have expressed their gratitude thus, for the features of his apostles Peter and Paul, and indeed Christ himself, have been preserved in colored portraits which I have examined. How could it be otherwise, when the Gentiles habitually followed their own Gentile custom of honoring them as saviors in this uninhibited way?"[30] The word the author uses for saviors, *sotires*, designates gods who have intervened in human affairs, to whom the votive offering of the icon was therefore a response.

Examples of icons made in response to divine deliverance by cures are fairly numerous. Two such instances are described in *The Life of Saint Symeon the Younger*, written by a contemporary of the saint shortly after his death in 594. According to this account, when the saint cured one woman who had suffered from sterility, she immediately placed an icon of the saint in her home, where other women venerated it and received further miraculous favors.[31] Similarly, when the saint cured a man suffering from a restriction of the lungs, he responded by placing an image of the saint above the door of his shop.[32] In both cases, as in the stories in Eusebius and in the Acts of John, the icons were made during the saint or *sotir*'s lifetime; icons are not mortuary portraits, as has sometimes been suggested.

Dedicatory inscriptions demonstrate that Christian votive offerings continued to respond to much the same spectrum of situations as had pagan votives. For example, Sphoracius, who was consul in 452, was saved from fire by the miraculous intervention of Saint Theodore, for whom he later dedicated a church next to his Constantinople palace.[33] A victory in war also remained an occasion to offer holy images, particularly on the part of emperors.[34] Even the reception of civic honors continued to prompt the commission of images, according to dedicatory epigrams written by Agathias. For example, a certain Theodore, when he received the proconsular throne, had an icon made of Saint Michael; another icon of this saint was made by four novice lawyers on completing their studies.[35] Why the archangel Michael was appropriate we do not know; perhaps he was thought to regulate civic affairs.

At the same time, dedicatory inscriptions on icons document certain changes in Christian votive use. New occasions for making dedications emerge. Repentance, conversion, pilgrimage, or reception into the monastic state or holy orders could all occasion the offering of an icon. On the frame of a Sinai icon of Christ the Ancient of Days, the dedicant, a man named Philochristos, addresses his savior directly with a petition "for the salvation and pardon of the sins of your servant" (fig. 44).[36] The fact that he deposited the icon at Sinai makes it likely that it marked not just Philochristos's repentance in general but his assumption of the monk's habit; his name, which means "Lover of Christ," is typical of the new names assumed with entry into the monastic state.[37] The direct address of his inscription to the Savior also signals a change in attitude; while pagan votive inscriptions are always in the indicative with quasi-legal overtones, Christian inscriptions are often addressed personally to God or to the saints within the icon with requests formulated in the imperative mode. They have thus become prayers. Other Christian epigrams are addressed instead to viewers of the icon, offering directions for how to approach the icon, documenting a process by which icons became objects of direct veneration (discussed in detail later).

THE DIVINE CHILD AND HIS MOTHER

In the context of Christian votive offerings one would naturally expect that Christ, the Divine Benefactor and Savior par excellence, would far outnumber other icon subjects. But Mary far outnumbers Christ in the early period, and the same is true over the long history of icons. This seeming imbalance is righted, however, if along with images of Christ by himself one adds images of Christ in his mother's embrace. Christ then appears as easily the most popular of icon subjects, as is fitting, but the preferred way of venerating Christ turns out to be as an infant on his mother's lap (fig. 45).[38] This surprising fact has somehow escaped notice, because classification of iconography treats images of Christ by himself (e.g., Christ Pantocrator, Emmanuel, or Ancient of Days) and reduces the Child to an attribute of the Mother of God.[39] But the child is more important than the mother, and this was not forgotten. While the Gospels often mention worship of the adult Christ (only the magi worship the Child), Christians of the early centuries preferred to focus on the mystery of the Incarnation. The irreconcilable appearance of God in human flesh lay beyond explanation but not beyond imaging, for it was aptly conveyed by the Child on his mother's lap. The Sinai collection includes some of the most striking early examples of this theme.

If one were to seek pagan antecedents for the veneration of a child god with his mother, Egypt is the most likely territory. In the classical world Dionysos and Herakles were worshipped in childhood manifestations but not in conjunction with maternal figures. In Egypt, however, the divine child Horus, or Harpocrates in his Hellenistic name, was intensely venerated and consistently associated with his divine mother, Isis. It is significant that it was in Egypt that Mary received the title "Theotokos" (God-bearer), a title that had belonged to Isis. Popularized by Origen, the term served as a shorthand expression of the mystery of the Incarnation.[40] This language was vindicated by Cyril of Alexandria at the Council of Ephesus in 431 and made into the foundation of the dogma of the two natures in Christ as defined at the Council of Chalcedon in 451.[41]

Figure 44 (opposite)
Christ as the Ancient of Days, beginning of the seventh century. Tempera on panel, 76 × 53.5 × 2.3 cm (29⅞ × 21 1/16 × ⅞ in.). The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, Egypt.

Figure 45 (below)
Mother of God, sixth century. Encaustic on panel, 34.5 × 20.6 × 0.7–0.8 cm (13⅝ × 8⅛ × ¼–⅜ in.). Bohdan and Varvara Khanenko Museum of Arts, Kiev, Ukraine.

In origin Horus was a god of the sky and patron of divine kingship, but in Hellenistic times he was especially venerated as a potent healer and as protector of children and family.[42] On the one hand, with youthful sidelocks and a childish finger-to-mouth gesture, his image appeared in sculpture, icons, and most commonly terracotta figurines frequently discovered in domestic shrines. On the other hand, his mother, Isis, "whose names cannot be numbered," was the most widely venerated goddess of the entire Hellenistic world and appeared in numerous guises alone and in connection with her child.[43] Scholarly attention to her role as nursing mother, "Isis lactans," has obscured the diversity of her motherly iconography.[44] In compositions with her child she sometimes nurses, sometimes offers her breast covered or bare, sometimes simply presents her child, in compositions that anticipate the variety of Mary's poses with her child. Hodegetria, the commonest type of Marian iconography, which is usually interpreted as Mary pointing to her child, can as well be interpreted in Isiac fashion as Mary offering her breast to her child.[45]

The Sinai painting of the enthroned Mother of God (fig. 46) presents suggestive reminiscences of Isis.[46] First of all, Mary sits on a gilded throne, magenta cushioned and ornamented with pearls and jewels, with a matching footstool. Such a throne is hardly the furniture of Mary of Nazareth, but

Figure 46 (opposite)
Enthroned Mother of God with Angels and Saints, sixth century. Tempera on panel, 68.5 × 49.7 × 1.5 cm (27 × 19⅝ × ⅝ in.). The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, Egypt.

it is a proper attribute of Isis. Isis's name seems to have meant throne, her hieroglyph was a throne, and she was protector of the pharaoh's throne. Mary's acquisition of this royal furniture can be read as evidence that she was every bit the equal of the ancient divine mother whom she had replaced.

This kind of competition of the Christian pantheon with its pagan antecedents is observed frequently in the formation of Christian iconography. The depiction of Mary's face even resembles that of Isis's (figs. 47, 48). While the military guards who flank Mary stare boldly at us, she refuses eye contact and looks slightly to our right, which has caused some puzzlement among art historians. But Isis too has a look that is remote and serene, above human problems. Like Isis, Mary has none of the portrait specificity of Egyptian mummy faces. For example, the friendly twinkle of reflected light, which is observed in Fayyum mummy portraits, is missing in her eyes. Her features are generalized to make her appear "divine." Indeed, this detached "Isis look" is characteristic of most early images of the Virgin.[47]

Figure 47 (left)
Isis(?), Imperial Roman. Encaustic on wood, 24.5 × 7.6 cm (9⅝ × 3⅛ in.). Aegyptisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, (Inv. 14443).

Figure 48 (right)
Isis, left wing of a triptych, AD 180–200. Tempera on wood, 40 × 19.1 × 1.27 cm (15¾ × 7½ × ½ in.). The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (74.AR.22).

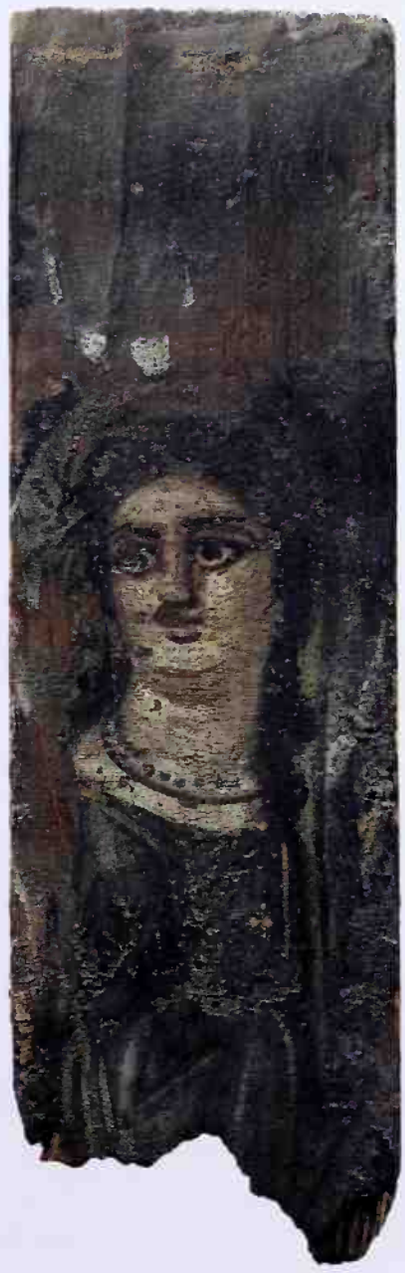


Figure 49
Enthroned Mother of God with Angels and Donor, sixth century. Tempera on panel, 164 × 116 cm (64⅝ × 45¾ in.). Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome

On either side of Mary in the same painting, angels turn their heads sharply at the interruption of the divine hand from above. These angels are key to the composition, which enjoyed wide popularity in pre-Iconoclast times. They are more than just attendants. Because of their ability to see what is happening in both worlds, angels are thought to understand the unfathomable mystery of the Incarnation better than mere mortals. Two surviving inscriptions guide us in interpreting their presence. In the huge icon at Santa Maria in Trastevere, attributed now to the sixth century, angels flank the enthroned Mother of God, each raising a hand in surprise at the mystery before them (fig. 49).[48] The inscription in the frame, incomplete though it is, refers to the angels, implicitly inviting the viewer's response: "The chiefs of the angels stand astonished at the birth of the child, for God himself has become (man)."[49] The angels' experience is cast in traditional language of the religious awe, or "fear and trembling," at the divine presence. The dedicant of the icon, Pope John III (r. 561–74) or his successor Benedict I (r. 575–79), enters the icon in reduced scale in the right foreground.

A second inscription has survived in the *Greek Anthology*, presenting another image of the Mother of God with angels: "My Queen, you hold in your arms your Child, God's all-embracing Son, at whom the angels shiver in awe. Make him gentle in heart toward mankind, and thus preserve from calamity the whole world."[50] The icon this inscription once enframed is now lost, but the text would perfectly suit the Sinai icon of this subject (see fig. 46), which has lost its frame. The prayer seeks Mary's intercession with her son, who holds the safety of the world in his arms. If the Sinai icon were Justinian's votive offering on the occasion of the dedication of the monastery to the Mother of God, it might appropriately have carried such an inscription for the safety of the world, over which Justinian claimed universal earthly dominion.

JUSTINIAN AS DEDICANT

The possibility of proposing personal interpretations is hampered by the lack of inscriptional evidence. Inscriptions were commonly entered onto icons' frames, but most of the frames are now missing or badly damaged. Besides the panel of Philochristos mentioned earlier, offered perhaps on the occasion of his receiving the monastic habit, only one other early Sinai icon bears an inscription explicitly naming a dedicant, and this is the fragmentary icon of Leo being received by Saint Theodore, who was one of Mary's military guards in an early icon at Sinai.[51] According to the inscription, Leo is a high government official, a *dekanos*—that is, a trusted palace messenger. Leo wears a blue mantle with pearled borders and the red shoes of the court (like those of Mary), and his head is framed with the square nimbus of a living person. Because the icon is at Sinai one must suppose Leo's personal connection with the monastery, such as a visit, more likely on official business from the emperor rather than as a simple pilgrim.

That the emperor Justinian was personally involved in the monastery is asserted by Procopius, who tells us that Justinian "dedicated" the church he built to the Mother of God, using the language traditional to votive offerings.[52] The site of the Burning Bush, in the garden in front of the monastery, suggests the dedication to Mary as container of God's fiery presence.[53] That Justinian should also have offered the Enthroned Mother of God icon to celebrate this accomplishment would be most natural. The high quality of the encaustic painting, its generally accepted date in the mid-sixth century, and its "find spot" at the monastery all reinforce this supposition. The icon might be seen to make explicit Justinian's prayer on behalf of his whole empire.

On similar grounds three other icons can be argued to be Justinian's personal votive offerings: the Blessing Christ (see fig. 50), the Saint Peter (see cat. no. 1), and the Saints Sergius and Bacchus (see cat. no. 3). These, along with the Enthroned Mother and Child discussed earlier, form a fairly tight-knit group assigned to distinguished patronage in Constantinople in the middle of the sixth century. Since its cleaning in 1962, the Blessing Christ has become Sinai's best-known icon.[54] Its personal association with Justinian is argued most forcefully by Weitzmann, who points out its very close technical association with the Enthroned Mother and Child, down to very minor decorative details such as the tiny punched rosettes in the gold halo. The image type seems to have had a special importance for the emperor, as it was reused on a silver cross of Justin II (r. 565–78) and on the solidi of Justinian II (r. 685–95). Derived from the facial type of Zeus, the father god of Greece, it was circulated in Egypt on icons of Serapis and Soknebtynis (fig. 51). But the name "Pantocrator" commonly given to its Christian appearance is technically anachronistic; the term is first used in the ninth century, when it refers to the use of this image type in dome decoration.[55] The inscription of "Philanthropos"

Figure 50
The Blessing Christ, first half of the sixth century. Encaustic on panel, 84 × 45.5 × 1.2 cm (33⅛ × 17⅞ × ½ in.). The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, Egypt

(Lover of Mankind) above Christ's right shoulder is later, but it reflects well the benevolent intention of Christ's blessing gesture. Where the icon was placed when it came to Sinai is not known, but the heavy wear on the lower part of the panel shows that it was available for the devout to greet or kiss it.

The Saint Peter icon places the saint before a classical niche, like the Blessing Christ and the Enthroned Mother of God, and shares many of their stylistic traits.[56] It may also have a personal connection with Justinian that has not been mentioned before. While it is well known that "Justinian" is the name the emperor assumed when he was made coemperor with his still-reigning uncle, the emperor Justin, his original name, "Petrus Sabbatius," is seldom referred to.[57] Justinian dedicated the first church he built in Constantinople to his name saint and to Paul. Erected in his private quarters in the palace, it seems to have been intended as a votive offering in celebration of Constantinople's reconciliation with Rome in 518, in which Justinian played a prominent role. An icon for his name saint would also be perfectly natural. It is the largest of the early icons in the Sinai collection, a gift worthy of the emperor, distinguished, as Kitzinger says, "by the intense, if aristocratically restrained humanity of the saint's countenance and by the extraordinary refinement of its pictorial technique."[58] While the three keys in the saint's hand are commonly taken to refer to papal primacy, curiously enough, in the city of his primacy, namely Rome, Peter carries a scroll instead. In early Christian murals at Bawit, however, keys are an attribute of abbots, entrusted with the administration of their monasteries.[59] Perhaps Peter, as overseer of the universal church, was seen as a suitable model for Longinus, the abbot of Sinai, who is known to us by his robust portrait in the apse of the basilica.[60]

Alongside his church of Saints Peter and Paul, Justinian erected a second church, which, it has been proposed, was another personal votive offering, this time in celebration of the peace treaty he signed with the Persian Empire in 532.[61] This time the saints honored, Sergius and Bacchus, were military officers who had served in the Roman army on the eastern frontier, where they suffered martyrdom. Justinian restored the Syrian city named for Saint Sergius—that is, Sergiopolis; his dedication of a church to the pair in Constantinople signifies his choice of Sergius and Bacchus as patrons of his eastern border. One might hypothesize that he offered the icon of these two saints (cat. no. 3) as a similar votive at Sinai, to secure the southernmost point in his eastern border through their protection.

Figure 51
Soknebtynis Enthroned and Mm. Graeco-Roman Museum, Alexandria, Egypt (22978).

FROM THE PRIVATE TO THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Icons offered as votives might have been kept in the treasury, called the *skeuophylakon*, where church vessels were kept, hung informally around the church, or placed in the privacy of the monks' cells. The decoration of monks' cells with mural icons was common in Bawit, Saqqara, and Kellis.[62] Their placement fulfilled the dedicant's need to respond to divine grace, and they constituted a permanent petition on that person's behalf. But once placed in the church they became vehicles for the prayers of whoever might see them, along with the candles, flowers, and incense that accompanied their cult. Thus they set up a certain competition with the veneration of the Sacrament on the altar. The first step toward integrating the icons into the eucharistic liturgy came with their formal installation on the epistyle of the chancel barrier. The enclosing of the Sacrament with icons invited the faithful to identify their veneration of the icons with their veneration of Christ, whom they believed to be present behind the barrier in the Eucharist. At this point icons became truly liturgical, inseparable from the official worship of the community; they ceased being simply objects of private devotion and became public media of prayer.

None of the icons considered to this point was made for framing in an epistyle or elsewhere on the chancel screen. Their frames speak of their character as individual, self-sufficient objects. But in the year 563, at his cathedral of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, Justinian installed a coherent set of silver-relief images of Christ, Mary and the angels, the prophets, and

Figure 52
Military Saint, relief icon from an epistyle in Bawit, Egypt, sixth/seventh century. Wood, carved, 30.2 × 12.7 × 1.3 cm (11⅞ × 5 × ½ in.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (1987.440.6).

the apostles on the epistyle of the sanctuary barrier.[63] A set of marble-relief panels with similar iconography was found in the ruins of the sixth-century church of Saint Polyeuktos in Constantinople, which may be from the epistyle of that church.[64] The earliest surviving wood icons designed expressly for epistyle use seem to be a pair of painted-relief icons from Bawit, which are now in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (fig. 52) and the Louvre.[65] In contrast to provisions for framing noted earlier, these panels have rabbets at top and bottom intended to fit into horizontal, grooved members. The panel in New York shows a military saint in an attitude of prayer, while that in Paris depicts the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary.

Meanwhile, icons attained a heightened spirituality or transparency as a medium of communicating with the divine, as witnessed by two inscriptions in the *Greek Anthology* from lost icons of archangels. Angels were a common subject on icons, as on the panel from Egypt, now in Paris (see fig. 43).[66] Both inscriptions attribute to the icons the power to conduct the soul into the realms of the invisible.

On the frame of one icon, Neilos Scholasticus wrote, "How bold, to make a figure of the incorporeal! The icon can even lead up to the spiritual contemplation of heavenly beings."[67] On the other, Agathias Scholasticus, the most distinguished hellenizing poet of Justinian's reign, speaks of the power of the icon both to make the angel present to the viewer and to transmit a person's prayers to the angel: "An invisible archangel, bodiless in the beauty of his shape, the courageous wax has dared to describe. How welcome! For in beholding the icon mortal man lifts his spirit to a mightier appearance, no longer distracted in veneration; engraving the image within himself he trembles at the presence. The eyes stir the depths of the soul, and by its colors art carries aloft the prayers of the mind."[68]

NOTES

1. G. Sotiriou and M. G. Sotiriou 1956–58; Weitzmann 1976.
2. Demus 1970, esp. chap. 6, pp. 205–41; Belting 1994.
3. Mathews 2001; Sörries 2003.
4. Dix 1945; Taft 1984; Schulz 1986.
5. The Lord's Prayer was in origin a prayer meant for private use in that it makes no reference to the liturgical action, and it was later introduced into the liturgy, as first attested in the early fourth century. Dix 1945, p. 94.
6. Origen, chap. 31, in *PG*, vol. 11, col. 552C.
7. Rodziewicz 1984; Zibawi 2003, pp. 72–95.
8. For a balanced assessment of how Justinian's behavior was viewed in his own time see Cameron 1985.
9. Anastos 1968.
10. Weitzmann 1976.
11. Langen 1890; Rassart-Debergh 1990; Rutschowscaya 1992. Each of these listings is incomplete.
12. Amato 1988
13. On the problem of the category "Coptic" in art history, see T. K. Thomas 2000.
14. *The Greek Anthology*, book 1 (1960 ed., vol. 1).
15. Weitzmann regarded the John the Baptist icon as the earliest in the Sinai collection, which he dated to the turn of the fifth to sixth century; Weitzmann 1976, p. 35. The best candidates for an earlier date are the pair of panels used as book covers for the Freer Gospels, for which Sharpe's recent inspection has suggested a date contemporary with the manuscript they enclose, namely late fourth or early fifth century. Morey 1914, pp. 63–81; Sharpe 1996.
16. Weitzmann 1976, pp. 8–9, 36–38.
17. Although Weitzmann (1976, p. 10) was unaware of the existence of bilateral icons in the early period, there are in fact two from Egypt: Cairo Coptic Museum no. 9083, Saint Theodore Stratilates and Archangel Gabriel (Skalova 1999, pp. 379–80); and Athens, Benaki Museum, no. 8954, Saint Paul and an unidentified saint (unpublished).
18. See Freer Gospels (note 15).
19. Mathews 2001, pp. 171–73.
20. Weitzmann 1976, pp. 8–9.
21. Weitzmann 1976, pp. 5–8; G. Sotiriou and M. G. Sotiriou 1956–58; Lazarev 1967, pp. 92–94.
22. The term *icon* was given currency by the Russian art historians of the nineteenth century. See Tarasov 2002.
23. Bremmer 1995.
24. Lalleman 1998, pp. 252–53.
25. Rouse 1902. Somewhat different and narrower than Rouse's definition of *votive* is the use that equates *votive* with *ex-voto*, meaning something done or offered to fulfill a promise or a vow to do so. H. Leclercq in *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, s.v. "Ex-voto."
26. Rouse 1902, p. 357.
27. Rouse 1902, pp. 322–34.
28. This process is described in some detail in Frankfurter 1998.
29. See Gary Vikan, Marlia Mundell Mango, and Annemarie Weyl Carr in *ODB*, s.v. "Votives."
30. Williamson 1966, p. 302.
31. Van den Ven 1962, chap. 118, pp. 96–98.
32. Van den Ven 1962, chap. 158, pp. 139–41.
33. *The Greek Anthology* 1.6 (1960 ed., vol. 1, p. 4).
34. *The Greek Anthology* 1.11 (1960 ed., vol. 1, p. 12).
35. *The Greek Anthology* 1.35–36 (1960 ed., vol. 1, p. 22).
36. Weitzmann 1976, pp. 41–42
37. Other icons that may mark entrance into the monastic state include Sinai B39 St. Eirene, in which the donor Nikolaos [Sab?]atianos appears in the brown and black colors of a monk (Weitzmann 1976, pp. 66–67), and Sinai B51 Crucifixion, the inscription of which seems to allude to the monastic clothing (Weitzmann 1976, pp. 82–83; Corrigan 1995).
38. Weitzmann 1976, pp. 15–18.
39. For example, see iconography entries in *ODB*, esp. "Christ: Types of Christ" and "Virgin Mary: Types of the Virgin Mary" by Nancy P. Ševčenko.
40. McGuckin 2001.
41. Pelikan 1971, pp. 226–66.
42. Quirke 1992, pp. 61–67.
43. Witt 1997.
44. Tran 1973.
45. Mathews and Muller 2005, p. 9.
46. Weitzmann 1976, pp. 18–21; Robin Cormack in Athens 2000, p. 262.
47. On Mary's detached look see Robin Cormack's discussion of the apse mosaic of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, "her most frequently viewed representation in the Byzantine world," in Cormack 2000a, pp. 111–13.
48. Amato 1988, pp. 26–32
49. Author's translation from Amato 1988, p. 26.
50. Author's translation from *The Greek Anthology* 1.31 (1960 ed., vol. 1, p. 20).
51. Weitzmann 1976, pp. 37–38; Kitzinger 1977, pp. 117–20.
52. Procopius, *Buildings* 5.8 (Dewing 1954–62, vol. 7, p. 356). Procopius uses the verb *anatithemi*, which Rouse (1902, p. 323) remarks is "universal for the votive offering."
53. The location of the bush behind the apse is not attested before the twelfth century. In 384 Egeria found the bush in the garden that was (and still is) located in front of the church: "Ante ipsam autem ecclesiam hortus est gratissimus habens aquam optimam abundantem; in quo horto ipse rubus est." Maraval 1982, p. 142.
54. Weitzmann 1976, pp. 13–15; Kitzinger 1977, pp. 120–22.
55. Matthews 1978.
56. Weitzmann 1976, pp. 23–26.
57. Martindale 1980, pp. 645–48.
58. Kitzinger 1977, p. 120.
59. Rutschowscaya 1998, pp. 30–31.
60. Forsyth and Weitzmann 1973, p. 13 and pl. 121.
61. Mathews 2005.
62. Zibawi 2003, pp. 72–93.
63. Paul the Silentiary, *Descriptio Sanctae Sophiae*, p. 682, translation in C. Mango 1972, p. 87
64. Harrison 1986, pp. 156–57, pls. 197–206.
65. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, no. A1987.440.6, unpublished; Louvre no. E17118, Musée du Louvre, Rutschowscaya 1986, p. 107, no. 352. The two panels are the same height, 29 cm (11⅜ in.), share the same gamut of colors, particularly the slate blue background, and are similarly carved; e.g., in the faces or in the cuffs of the garments.
66. Cabinet des Medailles, 1129b. Compare Paris 1992, p. 144. The inscription on the frame remains undeciphered. Other early icons of angels include the bilateral icon in Cairo (see note 17) and the very worn Sinai B21 (Weitzmann 1976, p. 49). Weitzmann found the inscription illegible, but the angel's name, "Michael," can be made out at the top.
67. Author's translation from *The Greek Anthology* 1.33 (1960 ed., vol. 1, p. 20).
68. Author's translation from *The Greek Anthology* 1.34 (1960 ed., vol. 1, p. 20).

ΔΕΔΕΜΕ
ΝΟΝ ΕΝ ΤΟΙC
ΟΥΡΑΝΟΙC +
ΚΑΙ ΟΕΑΝΑΥ
CHC ΕΠΙΤΗC
ΓΗC· ΕCΤΑΙ·
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Η ΜΑΡΤΥΡΟΥCΤΩ·
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ΜΟΡΦΩCΙΝ
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ΙΥ ΧΥ
ΕΙCΟΔΟΝ·
ΕΙC ΚΑ· ΜΑΡΙΑΝ
ΤΩ ΚΑΙΡΩ Ε
ΚΕΙΝΩ· ΠΑ
ΡΑΛΑΜΒΑΝΕΙ
ΟΙC ΤΟΝ ΠΕ
ΤΡΟΝ· ΚΑΙ
ΙΑΚΩΒΟΝ·
ΚΑΙ ΙΩΑΝΝΗΝ +
ΚΑΙ ΑΝΑΦΕΡΕΙ

The Sinai Codex Theodosianus: Manuscript as Icon

Father Justin Sinaites

Saint Catherine's Monastery, or, to use the older and more formal title, the Sacred and Imperial Monastery of the God-Trodden Mount of Sinai—these names evoke images of "a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness" (DEUT. 32:10), a fortress of ancient stone walls, treasures locked in storerooms almost impossible to access, due to the remoteness of the site and the fact that it is a living monastery. In the past fifty years, it has become known that the monastery holds the most important collection of Byzantine icons in the world, preeminently those dating from the sixth century, painted in the encaustic technique, and a multitude of other icons dating from the time of the Comnenian emperors. The monastery library is no less remarkable. Even after the depredations of Uspenskii and Tischendorf, the library contains some 3,300 manuscripts written in eleven languages, the oldest dating from the fourth century. It is second only to the Vatican library in the number of Greek manuscripts. It is perhaps preeminent in the antiquity and importance of the Christian Arabic and early Slavic manuscripts, and in the number of intact Byzantine bindings. Over three hundred of the Sinai manuscripts are copies of the scriptures.

Figure 53 (opposite)
Codex Theodosianus (Sinai cod. 204), ca. 975–1000 (cat. no. 7), p. 362.

Figure 54 (right)
The renowned biblical scholar Rendel Harris (at left) with the librarian of the Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine at Sinai, holding the Codex Theodosianus. Photo, 1923.

But it isn't as if all of these icons and manuscripts were discovered in abandoned caves. The manuscripts and icons were created for use in worship, study, and prayer, and they remain in this context, within the living community of the Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine—a community that traces its beginnings to the latter part of the third century and that has existed in unbroken continuity for over seventeen hundred years. The cycle of daily services, the ancient and distilled way of life, have been preserved by the community to this day. This gives an added significance to each icon and manuscript at Sinai. A lectionary written over one thousand years ago could be taken from the library and used in the services even now, for the language and the readings have remained the same. If we select one such volume and examine it carefully, perhaps we can learn something of the place of the

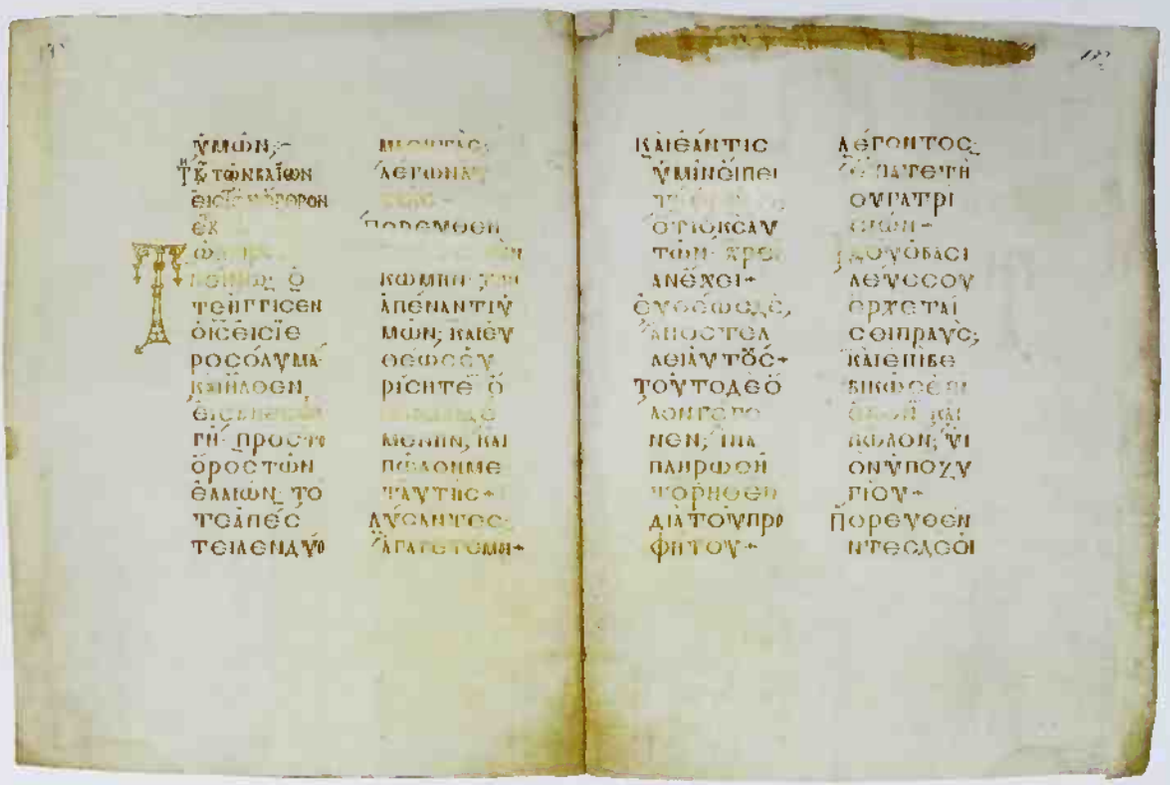


Figure 58
Codex Theodosianus (Sinai cod. 204), ca. 975–1000 (cat. no. 7), pp. 178–79.

manuscript in this living context of worship, study, and prayer, and from that, gain a few insights into the veneration of the Gospel in the Orthodox Church.

One of the greatest treasures of Saint Catherine's monastery is the manuscript known as the Codex Theodosianus, or the Gospel of the Emperor Theodosius—also called the Codex Aureus, or the Golden Gospel. The first catalogue of Sinai manuscripts, compiled by Archbishop Kosmas in 1704, lists "a very beautiful Gospel," very likely in reference to this manuscript. In 1709, it was shown to Hippolyt Vichensky in the monastery basilica, who wrote that it was the work of the emperor Justinian himself. Lord Prudhoe saw it in 1827 and offered the monks 250 pounds for it, but the monks declined his offer.[1] It was kept from Tischendorf in 1844. This same manuscript was shown to Nikodim Kondakov in 1881, who offered the monks 1,000 pounds from an English lord, but this offer also was declined.[2] And H. V. Morton, who visited the monastery in the 1930s, has written, "I was shown the famous Codex Aureus with its illuminated pages, and many other ancient and valuable manuscripts, now rightly kept under lock and key."[3]

The current binding dates from the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, the boards covered in scarlet velvet, with a cover of chased silver depicting the Crucifixion and the Four Evangelists, on which are visible traces of gilding and transparent enamel (cat. no. 7, page 138). On the inside boards one can see original Byzantine textile fragments—purple and white silk, woven in Constantinople in the tenth century. The pattern of the silk shows a large roundel in interlace, and a rinceau motif inhabited by lions. On the endleaves are indications that the boards were also once adorned with metal ornaments.

The manuscript contains 414 pages (it has been paginated, not foliated). At the beginning are seven brilliant illuminations (cat. no. 7, page 139; figs. 60–65). After that, every letter on every page is executed in gold leaf, which sparkles and gleams as the pages are turned. The entire manuscript is splendid and sumptuous, one of the most beautiful to survive from

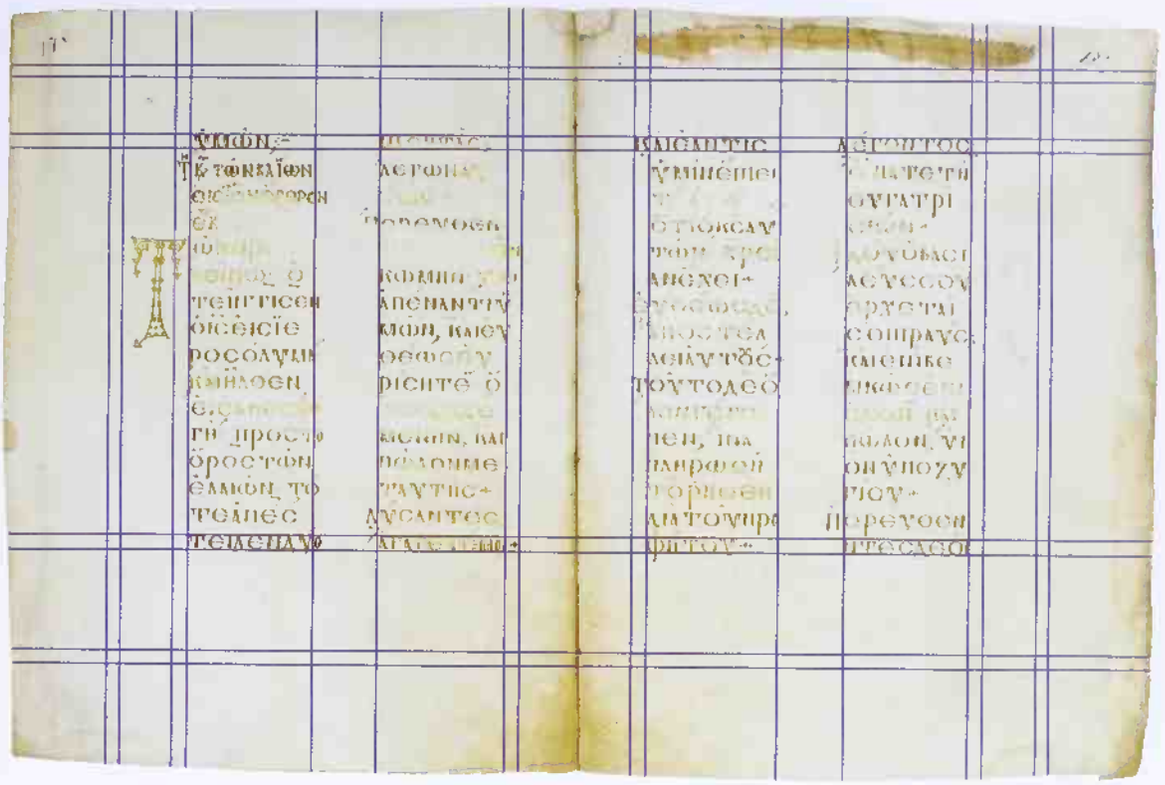


Figure 56
Codex Theodosianus (Sinai cod. 204), ca. 975–1000 (cat. no. 7), pp. 178–79 with ruling superimposed.

Byzantine times. The pages are written in two columns, with sixteen lines of text in each. In the seventeenth or eighteenth century, a piece of silk was attached to the top of every recto page to protect the gilded letters, and a strip of paper was glued to the outside edge of the page. More recently, the silk has been removed and pieces of tissue paper inserted between the leaves.

The titles for each lection are written in a decorative script that sets them off from the readings themselves. These are written in a round liturgical majuscule script (*rotonda liturgica*) of great nobility. In addition to the Greek accents, there are musical neumes to guide the intonation of the Gospels. Each lection begins with a decorative initial letter (e.g., figs. 53, 55). No two letters are the same, yet all retain a stylistic unity. The scribe has pricked each page, following a pattern, and then lightly scored lines for the writing of the text. If we trace along these lines, we can see the format used by the scribe. Is it possible to study the dimensions and proportions of these areas and reconstruct how the manuscript was designed? I submit that we can, and that doing so will increase our appreciation of this manuscript.

The leaves of the codex measure 21.8 by 29 centimeters (8⅝ by 11⅜ inches). If we begin with blank pages of the same dimensions as the manuscript, we find that the proportion width to height is three to four. Let us divide a page into three equal columns (fig. 56). Let us further divide the two inner columns, creating in each a subcolumn of one-third the width of that column to the inside of the page, and a subcolumn of two-thirds the width beside it. And now, let us use the innermost subcolumn as the inside margin of the page. We will have created two columns for text, separated by a central margin, all in harmony with the overall width of the page, in that each element is a simple division of the whole.

Next, let us take the width of the column of text, and use the same dimension for the top margin, and let us create a text area that has the same proportions of width to height as the page itself: three to four. If we reproduce the resulting design on the facing page, we will

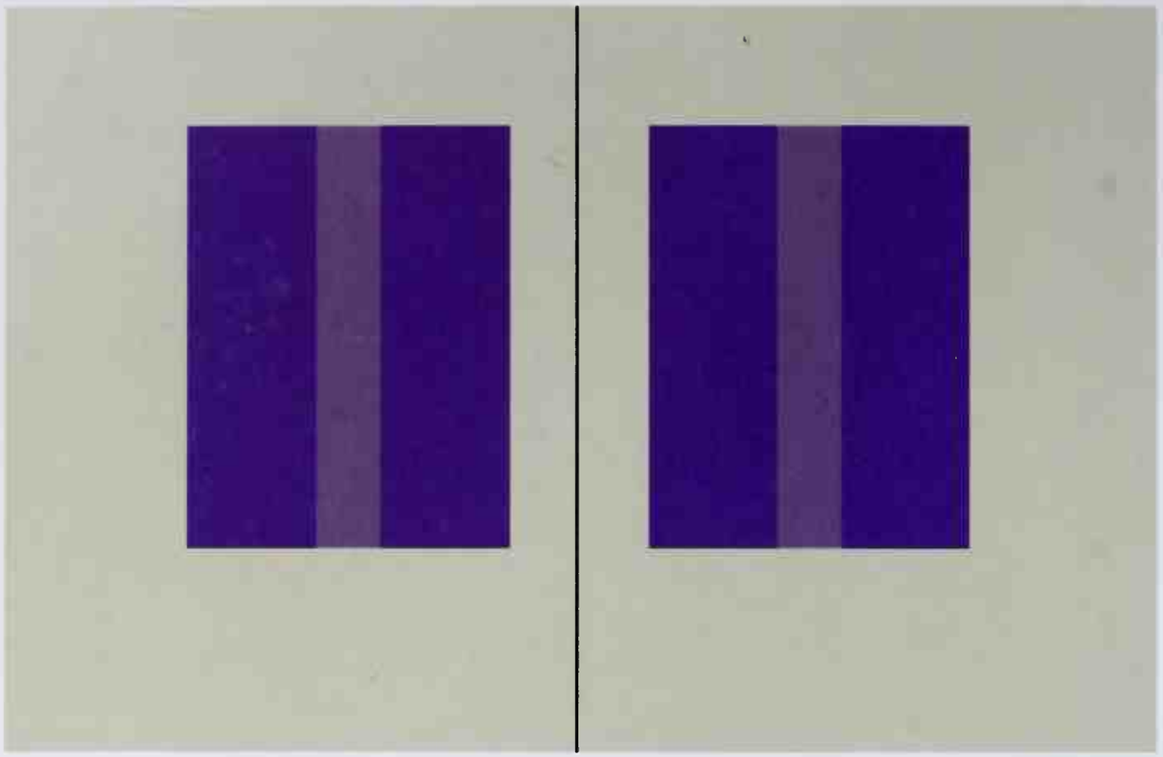


Figure 57
Diagram of page design for the Codex Theodosianus (Sinai cod. 204), ca. 975–1000 (see fig. 56).

have created text areas with the margins in classical progression—the inside margins being the smallest, the upper margins a bit larger, the outside margins larger yet, and the lower margins largest of all (fig. 57). The design has a sense of order and repose. The text area only covers one-third of the page; it is an extravagant design, but then, everything about this manuscript is sumptuous. This, I submit, is how the design was created for this manuscript.

Looking again at the guidelines made by the scribe, we see that the sections within each reading are set off by the first letter being written in the margin. There is an additional guideline scored to the left of the first column, of the same width as the margin between the columns, for the placement of the decorative initial letters. And last, the inner frame of the text area matches the inner frame of each of the illuminations, icon and text being placed in identical relation to the page.

SECTIONS OF THE LECTIONARY

The lectionary is divided into five sections. The first begins with the paschal season, when the Gospel of Saint John is read. This is the only opening in which the text is directly opposite one of the illuminations, the opening verses of the Gospel facing the icon of the Holy Apostle John (fig. 65). The lection is surmounted by a headpiece of intricate leaf patterns facing toward and away from each other to form a series of crosses. The reading begins with the first verse of the Gospel of Saint John, Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ Λόγος, "In the beginning was the Word." In this section, there is a reading for every day of the week following Pascha (Easter), and for every Sunday thereafter to the eleventh Sunday after All Saints, with additional readings for mid-Pentecost, the Feast of the Ascension, and the Saturday before Pentecost.

The second section, containing the readings for Lent and Holy Week, has a similar headpiece of intricate crosses, surmounted by different ornaments. The first Gospel appointed is the parable of the prodigal son. Since the manuscript was written at such a large scale, the choice of readings that were included was highly selective. This section contains only the first three

Figure 58
Headpiece for the Triodion, Codex Theodosianus (Sinai cod. 204), ca. 975–1000 (cat. no. 7), p. 161.

readings for the period of the Triodion (the Gospels that precede the commencement of the fast) and selected Gospels from Holy Week. But one of these is the longest in the entire manuscript: the first of the twelve Passion Gospels, read on the evening of Holy and Great Thursday. This is known as Christ's High Priestly Prayer and contains a reading from the Gospel of Saint John, beginning with John 13:31, "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in Him," and concluding with John 18:1, the whole occupying forty-five pages. This Gospel is read traditionally by the hierarch, ὁ Ἀρχιερεύς, the high priest, if he is present.

The third section contains the Gospels for feasts according to the liturgical year, with decorative headpieces generally at the beginning of each month. This section includes the Gospels for only fifteen feast days, two of which are unexpected. For May 10, there is a Gospel appointed for the feast of "the Dedication [of the church] of the Theotokos of our own Monastery." The manuscript was thus created for use at a particular monastery, which is not further specified, though the very splendor of the volume points to an origin in Constantinople, the capital of the empire. The next day, May 11, is the feast of the Dedication of Constantinople to the All-Holy Theotokos, which took place under the emperor Constantine in the year 330. Was the dedication of the monastery church in honor of the Theotokos, commemorated here, deliberately established to coincide with the feast of the dedication of the city itself? The second unexpected commemoration is that for February 7, on which day there is a Gospel for both matins and the Divine Liturgy on the feast of the Righteous Father

Figure 59
Headpiece for the feast day of Hosios Petros of Monobata, Codex Theodosianus (Sinai cod. 204), ca. 975–1000 (cat. no. 7), p. 341.

Peter of Monobata, whose icon is also included among the seven illuminations at the beginning of the volume (cat. no. 7, page 139). This would indicate that the manuscript was commissioned in devotion to the saint. Perhaps it was created for presentation to a monastery dedicated to his memory. As elusive as both of these clues prove to be, they are our only indications for the provenance of this splendid manuscript.

The fourth section contains the lections for the feasts of an apostle and a hierarch, and the fifth section, the eleven Gospels of the Resurrection (*Eothina*), read during matins on successive Sundays. Four of the latter are given in full, with references to where the others may be found in the preceding sections. In all, the manuscript contains seventy-one Gospels, as opposed to the almost five hundred in a modern lectionary. Such a manuscript would have been used on only the most important feast days.

THE TEXT

A few observations should be made about the text of this manuscript. Fifteen words are traditionally written as *nomina sacra* in copies of the scriptures—that is, words abbreviated precisely because they are sacred, with a line drawn over them to indicate the abbreviation. The manuscript conforms to this scheme exactly. The uniformity of the words treated as *nomina sacra* in the oldest manuscripts indicates that this practice extends to the earliest stratum of the Christian scriptures.[4] These *nomina sacra* are a compendium of Orthodox theology.

Applying the Greek adage Καταμανθάνωμεν ἐξ ὀνύχων τὸν λέοντα, "We may know the lion from his claws," the distinctive qualities of the text may be shown from three instances where it departs from the standard text. At John 1:28, this manuscript reads ταῦτα ἐν Βηθανίᾳ ἐγένετο πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου, "These things were done in Bethany beyond Jordan," where the standard text reads Βηθαβαρᾶ, "Bethabara," rather than Βηθανίᾳ, "Bethany." The reading in the Codex Theodosianus is regarded by scholars today as the earliest and most widely attested.

At Matthew 26:27, in the account of the Institution of the Eucharist, we read, καὶ λαβὼν ποτήριον, καὶ εὐχαριστήσας, "And He took the cup, and gave thanks." In the preceding verse, we read, λαβὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὸν ἄρτον, and then the same words, καὶ εὐχαριστήσας, "Jesus took bread, and gave thanks," rather than the expected reading, καὶ εὐλογήσας, "and blessed it." Most scholars would say this repetition is a transposition of the latter word to the preceding verse, but the reading does occur in a number of early manuscripts, among them texts dating from the fourth and fifth centuries.

And at John 19:27, the standard text reads, καὶ ἀπ' ἐκείνης τῆς ὥρας ἔλαβεν αὐτὴν ὁ μαθητὴς εἰς τὰ ἴδια, "And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home." In this manuscript, we read ἡμέρας, "from that day," rather than ὥρας, "from that hour," and ἐκεῖνος has been added after ὁ μαθητής, a clarification that was also felt necessary in the English translation: "that disciple" rather than simply "the disciple."

The unexpected readings in this manuscript would not have been the work of our scribe or scribes only. Rather, they reflect the complexities of a text that had been handed down over many centuries and through many manuscripts. These textual variants are a reminder that even in tenth-century Constantinople, there was not one monolithic Constantinopolitan text; each manuscript preserves a complexity of readings.

THE ILLUMINATION OF CHRIST

The manuscript opens with an icon of Christ Pantocrator—Christ the Ruler of All—depicted on a field of burnished gold, surrounded by a gemlike border (cat. no. 7; fig. 60).[5] He stands on a footstool, holding the Gospel in his left hand, his right hand raised in

Figure 60
Christ, Codex Theodosianus (Sinai cod. 204), ca. 975–1000 (detail, cat. no. 7), p. 1. Photo: Father Justin Sinaites.

blessing. On either side are the *nomina sacra* for "Jesus Christ," IC XC. The cross in his halo is executed in bands of translucent pigment the color of deepest gold, outlined in red. The halo itself is indicated by the gold leaf being subtly polished in a circle. The same technique is used to indicate the ground line; a line is scored on the parchment, and the gold below is polished across the field to set it off from the background above. The garments of Christ are painted in imperial purple and the blue of lapis lazuli, the two most costly and precious pigments, which were reserved for depictions of Christ and the Virgin Mary, the All-Holy Theotokos. The purple has been applied with complete mastery in a skillful wash technique not often seen in later iconography: the parchment shows through in a subtle way that gives the appearance of heavy silk. In none of the illuminations do the eyes of those depicted engage the viewer; they look off into the distance. The face of Christ is compelling, commanding, even severe, but at the same time, long-suffering and compassionate.

The Seventh Ecumenical Council met at Nicaea in the year 787 and confirmed the veneration of icons. The council was officially accepted in both East and West, but many bishops in the West remained hostile to it. Charlemagne commissioned a treatise, known as

the *Libri Carolini*, in refutation of the council, and it was also condemned at the Synod of Paris held in 824. While the veneration of icons had become, in the East, the very criterion of Orthodoxy, we cannot say that the theology of the icon was ever really understood in the West. We must describe its central tenets here.

In the year 754, the iconoclast emperor Constantine V proposed a dilemma for the Orthodox: In an icon of Christ, either the divine nature is portrayed along with the human nature, or it is not. Divinity cannot be portrayed. Either the divine nature is confused with the human nature (which is Monophysitism) or else, if the human nature alone is portrayed, the two natures are separated (which is Nestorianism). Saint Theodore the Studite answered with a dilemma of his own for the Iconoclasts: If Christ cannot be portrayed, then either he lacks a genuine human nature (which is Docetism) or his human nature is submerged in his divinity (which is Monophysitism).[6] It is true that Christ's human nature cannot be portrayed, for his human nature is that which he shares with all men in general, and as such, it can be contemplated only by the mind and touched only by thought.[7] But Christ's divine and human natures came together in the one hypostasis, as Saint Theodore goes on to say, "for this is the new mystery of the dispensation, that the divine and human natures came together in the one hypostasis of the Word, which maintains the properties of both natures in the indivisible union."[8]

When we say "man," we speak of that nature which all men hold in common. But when we say "a man," then we speak of the hypostasis, which is the "self-subsisting existence of that which is signified, and (so to speak) the circumscription consisting of certain properties by which those who share the same nature differ one from another."[9] It was in his hypostasis that Christ was perceptible, tangible—in a word, that he was circumscribable—in refutation of the Iconoclasts. "But if he assumed humanity in truth, as we confess, then the hypostasis of Christ is circumscribable: not according to its divinity, which no one has ever beheld, but according to the humanity which is contemplated in an individual manner in it."[10]

And that which is circumscribable is also depictable—hence Christ can be portrayed in icons, as Saint Theodore explains:

> The prototype is in the icon by the similarity of hypostasis, which does not have a different principle of definition for the prototype and for the icon. Therefore we do not understand that the icon lacks equality with the prototype and has an inferior glory in respect to similarity, but in respect to its different essence. The essence of the icon is not of a nature to be venerated, although the one who is portrayed appears in it for veneration. Therefore there is no introduction of a different kind of veneration, but the icon has one and the same veneration with the prototype, in accordance with the identity of likeness.[11]

In his own support, Saint Theodore was able to quote Dionysios the Areopagite, who had written in his *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, "Truth in the likeness, the archetype in the image: each in the other except for the difference in essence."[12] The Epistle to the Hebrews, as well, had drawn this same sort of correlation: the tabernacle in the wilderness, in that it was made according to the exemplar revealed by God to Moses, was thus "the pattern of things in the heavens," τὰ ὑποδείγματα τῶν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, and "the holy places made with hands" were "the figures of the true," ἀντίτυπα τῶν ἀληθινῶν (HEB. 9:23–24).[13]

The icon is a witness to the Incarnation and to the sanctification that Christ has made possible. Vladimir Lossky has expressed this well:

> The two natures of Christ, without being mixed, nonetheless know a certain interpenetration. The divine energies radiate the divinity of Christ and penetrate His humanity: the latter is therefore deified from the moment of the Incarnation, like an iron in a brazier that becomes fire though remaining iron by nature. The Transfiguration partially reveals to the Apostles this blazing of divine energies irradiating the human nature of their Master. This interpenetration of two natures—at once penetration of divinity into flesh and the possibility henceforth acquired by it to penetrate into divinity—is called περιχώρησις—as Saint Maximus the Confessor writes—or, in Latin, *communicatio idiomatum*.[14]

For the Orthodox, then, the icon is the culmination of the doctrines defined by the seven ecumenical councils. The feast day of the restoration of the holy icons is the feast day of Orthodoxy itself and is celebrated in every Orthodox church on the first Sunday of Great Lent.

THE ALL-HOLY THEOTOKOS

The second illumination depicts the Virgin Mary, the All-Holy Theotokos (fig. 61). She also is shown on a field of burnished gold, but the ornamental border is of a different design, as is the case for each of the seven illuminations in this manuscript. To either side are the *nomina sacra* for the words "Mother of God," ΜΗΡ ΘΥ. Her garments are also painted in imperial purple and the blue of lapis lazuli. Her right hand is clasped to her bosom in an attitude of humility, and she looks up in an expression of confident trust and obedience: "Be it unto me according to Thy word" (LUKE 1:38). In her left hand she holds a scroll, for she is

Figure 61
The Virgin Mary, Codex Theodosianus (Sinai cod. 204), ca. 975–1000 (cat. no. 7), p. 3. Photo: Father Justin Sinaites.

praised as Χριστοῦ βίβλος ἔμψυχος, ἐσφραγισμένη Πνεύματι, "Christ's living book, sealed with the Spirit" (*Canon of the Akathist Hymn*, written by Saint Joseph the Hymnographer, ninth century),[15] and as τὰς θεοχαράκτους πλάκας, ἐν αἷς ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ Λόγος, ἐγγραφεὶς ὑπὲρ λόγον, τὸ τοῦ νομικοῦ γράμματος ἐπαχθὲς εἰς τὴν τοῦ Πνεύματος ἐλαθρότητα μετήγκε, "the tablets inscribed by the hand of God, in which the Logos of God, having been written in, in a manner beyond expression, hath altered the heaviness of the written Law into the lightness of the Spirit" (*Homily on the Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple*, by Saint George of Nicomedia, also from the ninth century).[16]

On March 29, 867, Patriarch Photius gave a sermon on the occasion of the completion of the mosaic depicting the enthroned Virgin Mary and Christ child in the apse of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, a mosaic that may still be seen there today:

> If one called this day the beginning day of Orthodoxy (lest I say something excessive), one would not be far wrong. For though the time is short since the pride of the iconoclastic heresy has been reduced to ashes, and true religion has spread its light to the ends of the world, fired like a beacon by imperial and divine command, this too is our ornament; for it is the achievement of the same God-loving reign. And so, as the eye of the universe, this celebrated and sacred church looked sad with its visual mysteries scraped off, as it were (for it had not yet received the privilege of pictorial restoration), the countenance of Orthodoxy appeared gloomy. Now, casting off this sadness also, and beautifying herself with all her own conspicuous ornaments, and displaying her rich dowry, gladly and joyously she hearkens to the Bridegroom's voice, Who cries out saying, "All fair is my companion, and there is no spot in her. Fair is my companion." For, having mingled the bloom of colors with religious truth, and by means of both having in holy manner fashioned unto herself a holy beauty, and bearing, so to speak, a complete and perfect image of piety, she is seen not only to be fair in beauty surpassing the sons of men, but elevated to an inexpressible fairness of dignity beyond any comparison beside. All fair is my companion.[17]

HOSIOS PETROS AND THE FOUR EVANGELISTS

The third illumination depicts the Righteous Peter, Hosios Petros of Monobata (cat. no. 7, page 139). He is clad in his monastic habit: cassock, schema, analabos, belt, and rhason. His face is that of the uncompromising ascetic; his hands are raised in awe as he experiences the grace of God. We know little about Hosios Petros today. His name was included in the *Synaxarion* of the Church of Constantinople for February 7.[18] From this, the commemoration entered the collected *Lives of the Saints*, though without any biographical information. On his feast day, the following verses are read after the Sixth Ode in matins:

> Ἀγῶνα τὸν μέγιστον ἀνύσας Πέτρος
> Ἐν οὐρανοῖς εἴληφε πάντιμον στέφος.
> [Peter, having completed exceeding great ascetical struggles,
> Hath received an all-honorable crown in heaven.]

Even the place of Monobata is not known, though there are certain indications about its location. In the year 944, Metropolitan Alexander of Nicaea was deprived of his office and exiled to the Monastery of Monobata, where he was confined in a cave. From there, he managed to write twenty letters, all of which describe the tribulations he was forced to endure.[19] In his first letter, he writes that he has been banished "to the farthest reaches of the Emperor's land" (1.46), and in his third letter, he writes that he has been sent "unto the Cimmerians" (3.10). The Cimmerians inhabited the area to the north of the Caucasus Mountains in the

eighth century BC, from whence they invaded the eastern provinces of Asia Minor. The biblical land of Gomer is associated with the Cimmerians. After their defeat in the sixth century BC, a remnant of the Cimmerian population continued for a time to survive in the Crimea, on the northern coast of the Black Sea. But in Greek mythology, Cimmeria was the land of cold and darkness. Odysseus traveled there to speak with the shades of the dead. "The vessel came to the bounds of eddying Ocean, where lie the land and the city of the Cimmerians, covered with mist and cloud. Never does the resplendent sun look on this people with his beams, neither when he climbs towards the stars of heaven nor when once more he comes earthwards from the sky; dismal night overhangs these wretches always" (*Odyssey* 11.13–19). And in the *Argonautica* by Apollonius of Rhodes we read, "Here is the Cavern of Hades with its overhanging trees and rocks, from the chill depths of which an icy breath comes up and each morning covers everything with sparkling rime that melts under the midday sun" (*Argonautica* 2.734–39). If, then, Metropolitan Alexander's reference to the Cimmerians is not purely literary, it would seem to indicate a place at the most distant coasts of the Black Sea, "in the border area between Pontus and Armenia," as Jean Darrouzès has suggested,[20] or, as seems more likely, "in Byzantine Cherson of the Crimea," as Thomas Pratsch has written in a recent study.[21] After five months, Alexander was allowed to return to Constantinople, where he became a professor of rhetoric. In reading of the hardships that he endured, we also learn something of the austerities in which Hosios Petros won his enduring crown.

Philip Sherrard has written that a saint was

> one who, breaking through the barrier set by the forces of negation and illusion between man and God, and fusing the human and divine natures once more in vital conjunction, gave fullest evidence of that participation in the life of the Spirit by which human existence might be crowned. Hence the regard in which he was held was unrivalled, even by that in which the Emperor was held. The Emperor might be God's elect. The saint or holy man was more: he was an actual citizen in the here and now of the present life of the heavenly Kingdom, living holocaust of divine energies, witness of God, and in a certain sense God Himself. As such he was, like the Mother of God herself, a mediator between earth and heaven. He too was a source of mercy, miracle, and guidance, the father of the people among whom he dwelt, their healer and deliverer.[22]

Iconoclasts destroyed icons and relics. And since monastics were their most obdurate opponents, many monasteries were closed and their monks sent into exile or even put to death. This manuscript marks not only the restoration of the traditional piety, but also its veneration and exaltation: a Gospel written in letters of gold, with seven luminous icons, the whole bound in purple and white silk and adorned with metal ornaments, very likely the work of the imperial scriptoria of Constantinople. And it honors Hosios Petros, a monk renowned for his ascetic labors.

The holy man has been depicted in a completely dematerialized form; there is not the slightest hint of a body beneath the robes of his monastic habit. The Four Evangelists, in contrast, stand in the classical manner: the weight of the body is supported on one leg, with the other bent and the entire body turned slightly. These portraits have a tension and a dynamic quality that contrasts with the calm and repose of Hosios Petros. The Holy Apostle Matthew is an older man (fig. 62). His face is that of the initiate into sacred mysteries; he has seen, and understood. The garments are painted in muted rose and gray-blue, complementary colors used to great effect. Saint Mark is a young man (fig. 63). The folds of his garments are executed in agitated strokes, completely appropriate for one whose favorite expression was καί

εὐθύς, "and straightway," "and forthwith." The depiction of Saint Luke is more refined, the purple border on his tunic rendered in translucent pigment (fig. 64). He was the beloved physician and constant companion of the Holy Apostle Paul: "Demas hath forsaken me. Only Luke is with me" (2 TIM. 4:10–11). The last is the Holy Apostle John, the Son of Thunder, who could write, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (JOHN 1:1, 14; fig. 65).

This lectionary is one of the most brilliant examples of what has been called the Macedonian Renaissance, when the classical manner of painting (which had never been

Figure 62
Evangelist Matthew, Codex Theodosianus (Sinai cod. 204), ca. 975–1000 (Cat. no. 7), p. 8.

Figure 63
Evangelist Mark, Codex Theodosianus (Sinai cod. 204), ca. 975–1000 (cat. no. 7), p. 10.

entirely lost) was strongly evident and at the same time in perfect harmony with the more abstract and nonclassical mode. Through both modes, the Byzantine iconographer was able to convey the physical and the spiritual, the human and the divine. And, as Kurt Weitzmann has pointed out, "One of the reasons for the great inner strength of Byzantine art is that the two strands, the classical and the non-classical, are often used for artistic contrast, but nonetheless they never seem to be in conflict with each other."[23]

ICON AND GOSPEL

We know that likenesses of Christ and the apostles were preserved and venerated from early Christian times, but it was only when the place of icons in Christian worship and devotion became an object of dispute that a way had to be found to express a doctrinal justification for this veneration. The resulting doctrine was not something completely new, but a clarification of what had been inherent in the faith from the beginning. A similar pattern of development can be traced for other doctrines in the early Church. The Christian Gospel, in contrast, has always been held in honor and needed no such doctrinal justification.

We have traced the Orthodox veneration of icons in some detail. Having done so, we may now use these insights in general, and this manuscript in particular, to explore something of the Orthodox veneration of the Gospel. Those who defended the veneration of icons pointed out the correlation between sacred image and sacred text. Referring to the "divinely written Gospels," Saint Theodore the Studite said, Christ "nowhere told anyone to write down the 'concise word,' yet His image was drawn in writing by the Apostles, and has been preserved up to the present. Whatever is marked there with paper and ink, the same is marked on the icon with varied pigments or some other medium. For the great Basil says, 'Whatever the words of the narrative offer, the picture silently shows the same by imitation.'"[24]

He also said, "So whether in an image, or in the Gospel, or in the cross, or in any other consecrated object: there God is manifestly worshipped 'in spirit and in truth,' as the materials are exalted by the raising of the mind towards God. The mind does not remain with the materials, because it does not trust in them: that is the error of the idolaters. Through the materials, rather, the mind ascends towards the prototype: this is the faith of the Orthodox."[25]

Saint John of Damascus, who was a generation older than Saint Theodore, wrote *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*. In his third treatise we read,

Figure 64 (opposite, left) Evangelist Luke, Codex Theodosianus (Sinai cod. 204), ca. 975–1000 (cat. no. 7), p. 12.

Figure 65 (opposite, right) Evangelist John, Codex Theodosianus (Sinai cod. 204), ca. 975–1000 (cat. no. 7), p. 14.

> The Lord blessed His disciples, saying, "Many kings and prophets longed to see what you see, and they did not see, and to hear what you hear, and they did not hear. Blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear." Therefore the Apostles saw Christ bodily and what He endured and His miracles and they heard His words; we also long to see and to hear and to be blessed. They saw face to face, since He was present to them bodily; in our case, however, since He is not present bodily, even as we hear His words through books and are sanctified in our hearing and through it we are blessed in our soul, and venerate and honor the books, through which we hear His words, so also through the depiction of images we behold the form of His bodily character and the miracles and all that He endured, and we are sanctified and assured, and we rejoice and are blessed, and we revere and honor and venerate His bodily character. Beholding His bodily form, we also understand the glory of His divinity as powerful. For since we are twofold, fashioned of soul and body, and our soul is not naked but, as it were, covered by a mantle, it is impossible for us to reach what is intelligible apart from what is bodily. Just as therefore through words perceived by the senses we hear with bodily ears and understand what is spiritual, so through bodily vision we come to spiritual contemplation. For this reason Christ assumed body and soul, since human kind consists of body and soul; therefore also baptism is twofold, of water and the Spirit; as well as communion and prayer and psalmody, all of them twofold, bodily and spiritual, and offerings of light and incense.[26]

During matins every Sunday, the priest reads the appointed lection for the Resurrection, after which he carries the Gospel into the center of the church, and the faithful venerate and kiss the Gospel, reverencing the Savior now risen from the dead. In the Divine Liturgy, the priest comes into the center of the church with the Gospel, holding it on high and proclaiming, Σοφία, Ὀρθοί, "Wisdom. Stand aright." And the choirs chant, Δεῦτε, προσκυνήσωμεν καὶ προσπέσωμεν Χριστῷ, "Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ." Given this veneration for the physical volume of the Gospel, the distinction drawn by these two saints is all the more significant; since each of us consists of body and soul, "it is impossible for us to reach what is intelligible apart from what is bodily." The mind, however, does not remain with what is tangible but ascends from it to the prototype.

SAINT MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR

With this understanding of the ascent to the prototype, we have come on an insight that is of the greatest importance. It is a recurring theme in the writings of Saint Maximus the Confessor, who lived in the first half of the seventh century and was thus a contemporary of Saint John Climacus, abbot of Sinai. If we examine carefully what he has written about the Gospel, we will gain further insights into the Orthodox understanding of this ascent, and the link between the tangible and the intelligible, the material and the spiritual.

In his *Two Hundred Texts on Theology*, Saint Maximus writes that when the Logos of God first draws near to men who cannot come to the unmediated perception of spiritual realities, he selects things that are familiar to them, combining various stories, enigmas, parables, and dark sayings. In this he is like a teacher who uses simple stories and illustrations to bring students to an understanding of ideas they would not have been able to grasp directly. "The Logos becomes incarnate in each of the recorded sayings." Saint Maximus thus draws the closest parallel between the incarnate Word and the Word expressing Himself in syllables and letters. But when the understanding is opened to perceive the inner meaning of scripture, then "He is contemplated in His true simplicity," as Christ was with God the Father from before all ages.[27]

In this same work Saint Maximus draws the contrast between letter and spirit:

> The initial stages of learning about religious devotion are naturally related to the flesh. For in our first encounter with religion we come into contact with the letter and not the spirit. But as we get nearer to the spirit and refine the materiality of words with the more subtle forms of contemplation, we come to dwell—so far as is possible for man—purely in the pure Christ, so that we can say with Saint Paul, "Though we have known Christ according to the flesh, now we no longer know Him in this manner." That is to say, we no longer know Him according to the flesh because, through the intellect's naked encounter with the Logos stripped of the veils covering Him, we have advanced from knowing Him according to the flesh to knowing His "glory as of the only-begotten Son of the Father."[28]

These distinctions are further developed in Saint Maximus's *Mystagogia*, in which he draws a series of progressions. The Holy Scriptures can be seen as comprising Old Testament and New, or the Law, the Prophets, and the Gospel. These progressions, these ascents, can be made in that the scriptures are an ordered whole. But, more strikingly, he goes on to say,

> the historical letter of the entire Holy Scriptures, Old Testament and New, is a body, while the meaning of the letter and the purpose to which it is directed is the soul. . . . And let him through an informed study of Holy Scripture wisely get past its letter and rise up to the Holy Spirit, in whom are found the fulness of all goodness and the treasures of knowledge and the secrets of wisdom. If anyone is shown to be interiorly worthy, he will find God Himself engraved on the tablets of his heart through the grace of the Spirit, and with face unveiled will see as in a mirror the glory of God, once he has removed the veil of the letter.[29]

The Holy Apostle Paul had written of the veil that conceals the meaning of scripture, and of the soul reflecting the glory of God as in a mirror, "but we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 COR. 3:18). We will not fully appreciate these references to a mirror unless we know how mirrors were understood in the Greek world. Plato, in an appendix to the *Timaeus*, explains that mirror images are formed when the light from the eye meets the light from what is seen on the surface of the mirror, and these two rays of light mingle there to form the image. Thus mirror images actually exist. The mirror, when it is clear, accurately conveys the image that is seen, even as the soul, when it has been purified, becomes like a mirror reflecting the glory of God; it is changed into a real image of God, though God and his image remain distinct according to nature.[30]

In his *Ambigua*, Saint Maximus carries these observations yet further as he considers the significance of the Transfiguration of Christ; not only did Christ himself become radiant with light, but his garments also shone with unearthly splendor. He writes, "The whitened garments conveyed a symbol of the words of Holy Scripture, which in this case became shining and clear and limpid to the Apostles, and were grasped by the mind without any riddling puzzle or symbolic shadow, revealing the meaning that lay hidden within them."[31] The garments can be understood as the words of Holy Scripture, while the incarnate Word is Himself the concepts conveyed by scripture. The words become luminous precisely because they are the garments of the living Word, delineating His person.

The Transfiguration was the occasion on which the eyes of the disciples were opened to behold the "blazing of divine energies irradiating the human nature of their Master." But it was also a prefiguring of the Second Coming, and this contrast between the two advents of Christ furnishes Saint Maximus, in his *First Century on Theology*, with yet another illustration for the distinctions we have been tracing:

Figure 66
Headpiece for the feast day of the Transfiguration, Codex Theodosianus (Sinai cod. 204), ca. 975–1000 (detail, fig. 53).

To the more diligent students of Holy Scripture the Lord is clearly shown as having two forms. The first is common and more popular, and it can be perceived by many. The text "We saw Him and He had no comeliness or beauty" refers to this form. The second is more hidden, and it can be perceived only by a few, that is, by those who have already become like the holy apostles Peter and John, before whom the Lord was transfigured with a glory that overwhelmed the senses. The text "Thou art fairer than the children of men" refers to this form. The first of these two forms is consonant to beginners; the second to those perfected in spiritual knowledge, in so far as such perfection is possible. The first is an image of the Lord's initial advent, to which the literal meaning of the Gospel refers, and which by means of suffering purifies those practicing the virtues. The second prefigures the second and glorious advent, in which the spirit of the Gospel is apprehended, and which by means of wisdom transfigures and deifies those imbued with spiritual knowledge: because of the transfiguration of the Logos within them "they reflect with unveiled face the glory of the Lord."[32]

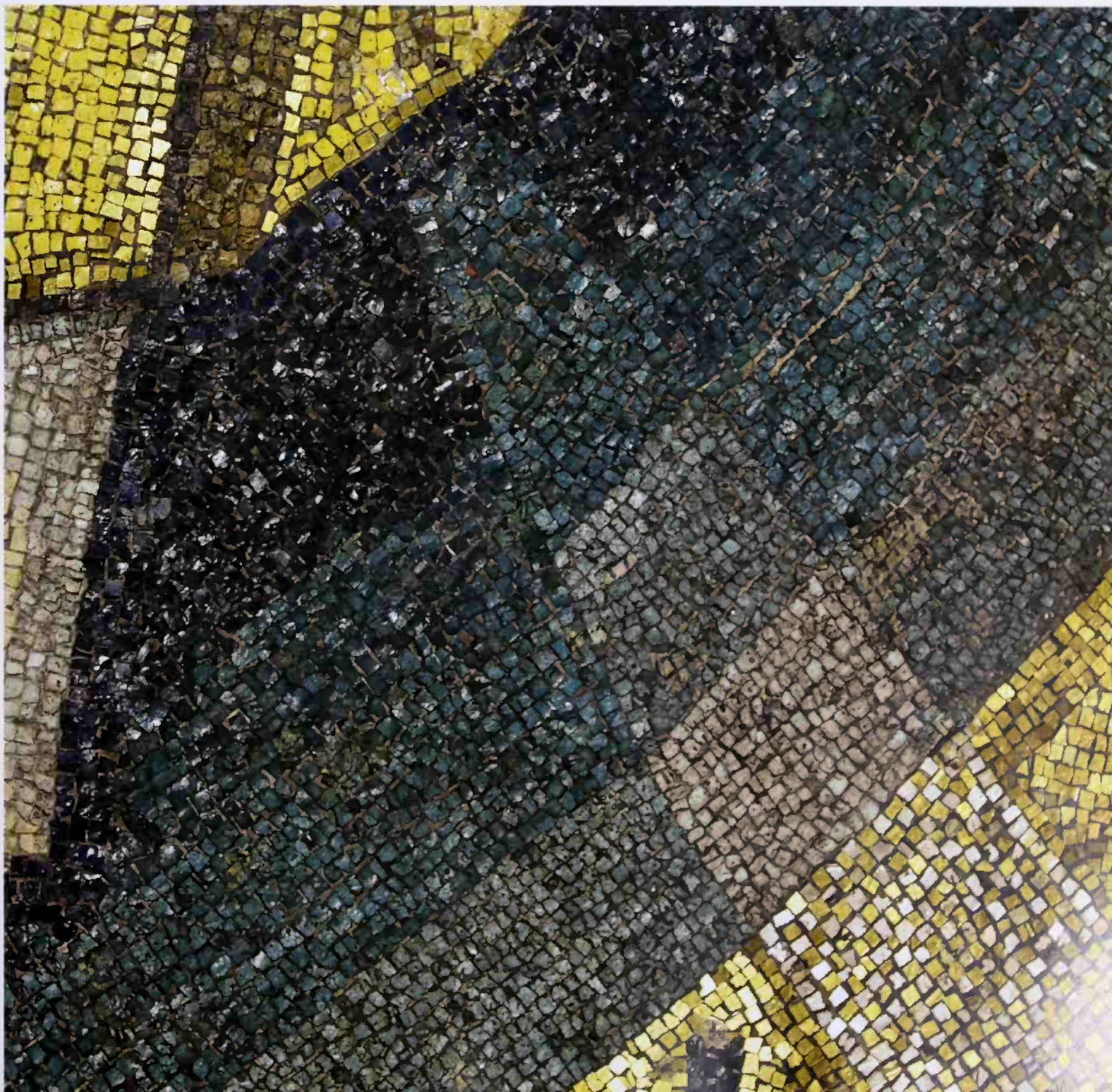
ΙΩΑΝΝΗC
ΙΑΚΩΒΟC
ΠΕΤΡΟC

TRANSFIGURATION

These references become all the more significant when we consider that this very Gospel was read at Sinai beneath the incomparable mosaic of the Transfiguration of Christ, a mosaic dating to the middle of the sixth century (fig. 67). Christ is radiant in glory, his face shining as the sun, his raiment white and glistening. His right hand is raised in blessing, while his left hand remains veiled. He is depicted within a mandorla of graduated blue tesserae set in four concentric bands, with the darkest blue at the center. Eight rays of light extend outward from his person. The artist has achieved this by using the next-higher register of color within each of the bands, until the light emerges white from the mandorla (fig. 68). A ray of light extends to each of the figures who are with Christ: the holy prophets Elijah and Moses, and the Holy Apostles John, Peter, and James.

Figure 67 (opposite) Transfiguration mosaic in the apse. Photo: Father Justin Sinaites.

Figure 68 (below) Transfiguration mosaic (detail, fig. 67).



The blue tesserae call to mind God's revelation to Moses and the Seventy Elders of Israel at the God-trodden Mount of Sinai: "And they saw the place where the God of Israel stood: and there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and as it were the appearance of the firmament of heaven in its clearness. And of the elect of Israel not even one was lost; also they appeared in the dwelling place of God, and did eat and drink" (Exod. 24:10–11).

Evagrius the Solitary, who lived in the fourth century, has invoked these verses as a spiritual place to which all are summoned to enter: "When the mind has put off the old man and clothed itself with grace, then during prayer it will see its own nature like a sapphire or the color of heaven. In Scripture this is called the dwelling place of God that was seen by the Elders on Mount Sinai."[33]

All of these reflections reach their culmination in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, embracing both the revelations of God in the past and the fulfillment of time in the future, bringing them to life in the timeless reality of the liturgy.

We may think of this very manuscript, then, raised on high before the mosaic of the Transfiguration at the entrance with the Gospel, the priest proclaiming, Σοφία, Ὀρθοί, and bearing it into the sanctuary, placing it on the Holy Table, inviting the faithful to enter into the mysteries set forth. Saint Theodore the Studite has written, concerning the holy icons, "The copy shares the glory of its prototype, as a reflection shares the brightness of the light."[34] It is in this sense that this manuscript also may be understood as an icon. The letters are radiant and gleaming, the splendor of the materials a tribute to the words of the Gospel; they reflect the glory of the prototype, beckoning us to ascend to the spirit of the Gospel, into the presence of the Logos himself.

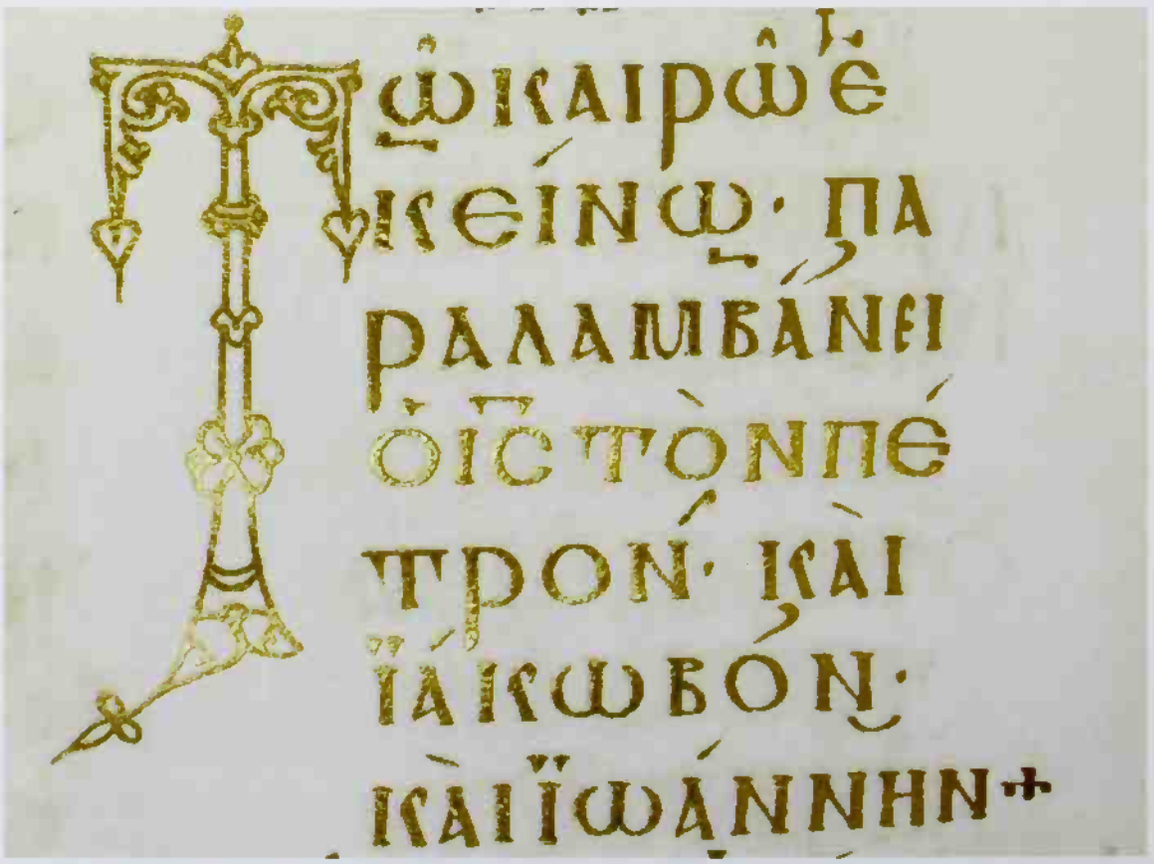


Figure 69
Initial *T*, Gospel for the feast day of the Transfiguration, Codex Theodosianus (Sinai cod. 204), ca. 975–1000 (detail, fig. 53)

NOTES

I would like to express my thanks to Annie Labatt, who served untiringly as research assistant for this essay. I would also like to express my thanks to Professor David Armstrong, and to Evangelos Zournatzis, for their help.

1. Algernon Percy, first Baron Prudhoe, and from 1842, fourth Duke of Northumberland. In 1828 he purchased a number of Coptic manuscripts from the Monastery of Deir al-Baramus in the Wadi Natrun, which he presented to Archdeacon Henry Tattam. These are now in the John Rylands Library in Manchester, England.
2. Clark 1953, p. 30.
3. Morton 1938, p. 314.
4. Roberts 1979, p. 46.
5. Frantz 1934.
6. Roth 1981, p. 11. See also Lossky 1983, p. 138. The three essays by Saint Theodore the Studite have recently been edited and beautifully printed, with a translation into modern Greek facing each page of the original text: Dalkos 1998.
7. Antirrheticus 3.16 (*PG*, vol. 99, col. 397A; translated in Roth 1981, p. 83).
8. Antirrheticus 1.4 (*PG*, vol. 99, cols. 333A–B; translated in Roth 1981, p. 23).
9. Antirrheticus 3.17 (*PG*, vol. 99, col. 397B; translated in Roth 1981, pp. 83–84). For a discussion of the term *hypostasis*, see Lossky 1998, pp. 50–55.
10. Antirrheticus 3.24 (*PG*, vol. 99, col. 401A; translated in Roth 1981, p. 87). The reference is to 1 Timothy 2:5.
11. Antirrheticus 3.3.1 (*PG*, vol. 99, cols. 420D–421A; translated in Roth 1981, p. 103).
12. Dionysios the Areopagite, *The Ecclesiastical Hierachy*, 4.3.1 (*PG*, vol. 3, col. 473C), quoted in Saint Theodore, Antirrheticus 2.11 (*PG*, vol. 99, col. 357C; translated in Roth 1981, p. 48).
13. Compare Antirrheticus 1.6 (*PG*, vol. 99, col. 336B; translated in Roth 1981, p. 25).
14. Lossky 2001, p. 99.
15. *PG*, vol. 105, col. 1020A.
16. *PG*, vol. 100, col. 1425b.
17. C. Mango 1958, pp. 291–92.
18. Delehaye 1902, col. 450; compare also col. 988.
19. Darrouzès 1960, pp. 67–98.
20. Darrouzès 1960, p. 74.
21. Pratsch 2004, p. 255. In AD 1029, George Baravatzé, abbot of Iveron, was summoned to Constantinople and banished to the Monastery of Monobata, where he died (Peeters 1917–18, pp. 61–62). And in AD 1041, the Empress Zoe exiled John the Orphanotrophos to the Monastery of Monotaba (Thurn 1973, pp. 416, 423). In spite of these historical references, the exact location remains uncertain.
22. Sherrard 1965, p. 94.
23. Weitzmann 1966a, p. 174.
24. Antirrheticus 1.10 (*PG*, vol. 99, cols. 340D–341A, translated in Roth 1981, pp. 30–31).
25. Antirrheticus 1.13 (*PG*, vol. 99, col. 344D; translated in Roth 1981, p. 34).
26. Louth 2003, p. 93.
27. Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware 1981, p. 151.
28. Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware 1981, p. 152.
29. Berthold 1985, p. 197.
30. Louth 1981, pp. 79–80.
31. Louth 1996, p. 109.
32. Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware 1981, pp. 134–35.
33. Evagrius 1957, p. 54.
34. Antirrheticus 1.8 (*PG*, vol. 99, col. 337B; translated in Roth 1981, p. 28).

Christian Pilgrimage to Sinai until the Late Fifteenth Century

David Jacoby

Christian pilgrimage to holy sites began in the early fourth century. It was generated by the sanctification of places associated with sacred events recorded in the Bible, a process furthered by Emperor Constantine I, who ruled from 324 to 337, and by Church leaders in the following decades. These sites were places of memory that one could see, touch, and venerate, and thereby partake in their holiness. Pilgrimage, a spiritual experience and a devotional journey, also extended to the visitation of living personages.[1]

Christian monks had settled in isolated communes in the southern Sinai peninsula beginning in the third century in order to be near biblical sites. Monasticism in that region reached its peak in the sixth and seventh centuries. The three holiest locations were Jebel Musa, or Mount Moses, 2,285 meters (7,497 feet) high (identified in the past with Mount Sinai), which witnessed the giving of the Covenant; the site of the Burning Bush at the foot of Mount Sinai, in which God appeared to Moses—a location marked by a church by the late fourth century; and, finally, the cave between Mount Sinai and Jebel Sufsafa, formerly identified with Mount Horeb, in which the prophet Elijah took refuge and was addressed by God. Christian pilgrimage to sites associated with Moses was a new phenomenon, since there was no Jewish tradition of pilgrimage to Sinai.[2] The Spanish nun Egeria, who visited the region in 383/384, provided the earliest known personal account of Christian pilgrimage to Sinai, yet she was not the first pilgrim to the region. The monks told her that it was customary to recite a prayer when one first caught sight of the Mountain of God. Egeria also displayed intense interest in the ascetic hermits living in the harsh conditions of Sinai. Local monks served as her guides to holy sites and people.[3] This remained the rule in the following centuries.

The nature of pilgrimage to Sinai changed over time. Emperor Justinian I ordered the construction of the fortified Mount Sinai monastery between 548 and 565.[4] The Burning Bush was included in its compound, and from an early date the monastery took the name of the "Virgin of the Burning Bush" (Greek, *tou Batou*). The existence of the monastery must have stimulated Christian pilgrimage to Sinai. Its position as the focus of that movement was enhanced by the gradual decline of the monastic movement in the region, which began after the Arab conquest of the seventh century and lasted into the tenth century.[5]

By that time Saint Catherine, a martyr who died because she upheld her Christian faith, was being revered both in Byzantium and in the West. According to an early Greek version of her life, her beheaded body was carried by angels to the top of the highest mountain in Sinai

Figure 70 (opposite)
Apse, Chapel of the Burning Bush. The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
Photo: Bruce White.

(later known as Jebel Katrina, or Mount Saint Catherine, 2,683 m [8,803 ft.]). The Byzantine hagiographer Symeon Metaphrastes wrote a life of Saint Catherine in the early 960s, from which other lives in Greek and Latin derive. Later accounts report that the saint's body was transferred from the mountain where it lay to the Sinai monastery, where it continuously exuded oil. The Byzantine depictions of Saint Catherine, dating from the tenth century onward, did not stress the saint's connection to Sinai, contrary to the saint's cult that spread in the West beginning in the mid-eleventh century.[6] An Armenian inscription in eastern Sinai referring to Saint Catherine has been tentatively ascribed to the tenth or eleventh century.[7] Such an early dating is rather doubtful, since the saint's cult in the monastery itself is documented only from the twelfth century onward.

The evidence regarding pilgrimage to Sinai is sparse, scattered, and unevenly distributed over time until the fourteenth century, when it becomes almost continuous. It consists of pilgrimage guides focused on biblical geography, personal pilgrimage accounts, hagiographical texts, as well as archaeological remains and inscriptions. It has often been suggested that various painted panels, icons, manuscripts, and other objects preserved at the Sinai monastery were personally brought there by donors on pilgrimage. However, these items could well have been transferred by monks settling in the monastery,[8] or by monks from the Sinai monastery stationed in locations such as Acre and Cairo.[9] Similarly, it cannot be taken for granted that works displaying iconographic or stylistic elements similar to those present in objects currently at the monastery or related to its cults were produced by individuals who had visited the site,[10] since we cannot ascertain whether the objects were indeed in the monastery at the time ascribed to these visits.

Precious evidence about the pilgrim's itineraries is offered by the few extant pilgrimage accounts from the period preceding the Arab conquest of Sinai in the first half of the seventh century, as well as by inscriptions and crosses carved on rocks, in the monastery, and at holy sites in its vicinity. The shortest way from Jerusalem and the main pilgrim route in the late sixth and early seventh centuries led through the Negev to Aila (now Elat), and from there to the Sinai monastery. The largest concentration of Armenian and Georgian inscriptions and crosses has been found in Wadi Haggag along the route connecting Aila to the monastery. Another itinerary from Jerusalem reached the Mediterranean coast and from there proceeded to Pelusion, Clysma at the head of the Gulf of Suez, then southward to Gharandal, from which three routes led to Mount Sinai (fig. 71). A clay ampulla found in a pilgrim's grave along one of these routes attests to pilgrimage from Egypt. A section of the route leading from Raithou on the Gulf of Suez to the monastery was paved in the sixth century or later to allow the passage of camels.[11]

An Ethiopian pilgrim has left an inscription in Wadi Haggag, ascribed to the second half of the sixth or the early seventh century. It is likely that the Syriac and most Greek inscriptions nearby belong to the same period.[12] Some Armenian monks lived in the monastery in the sixth and the first half of the seventh centuries.[13] A few sources mention large groups of several hundred Armenian pilgrims visiting Sinai, which must have included many laymen. One may wonder whether these numbers were common, especially from 614 to 627, when the Persians ruling over the Holy Land apparently encouraged Armenian pilgrimage,[14] or whether these groups were rather exceptional and therefore noted. Armenian pilgrimage continued after the Arab conquest, mainly through Wadi Haggag, if we rely on inscriptions.[15] Georgian pilgrimage is attested by a few graffiti both in western and eastern Sinai, dated to the period from the seventh to the eleventh century. This pilgrimage may have been stimulated

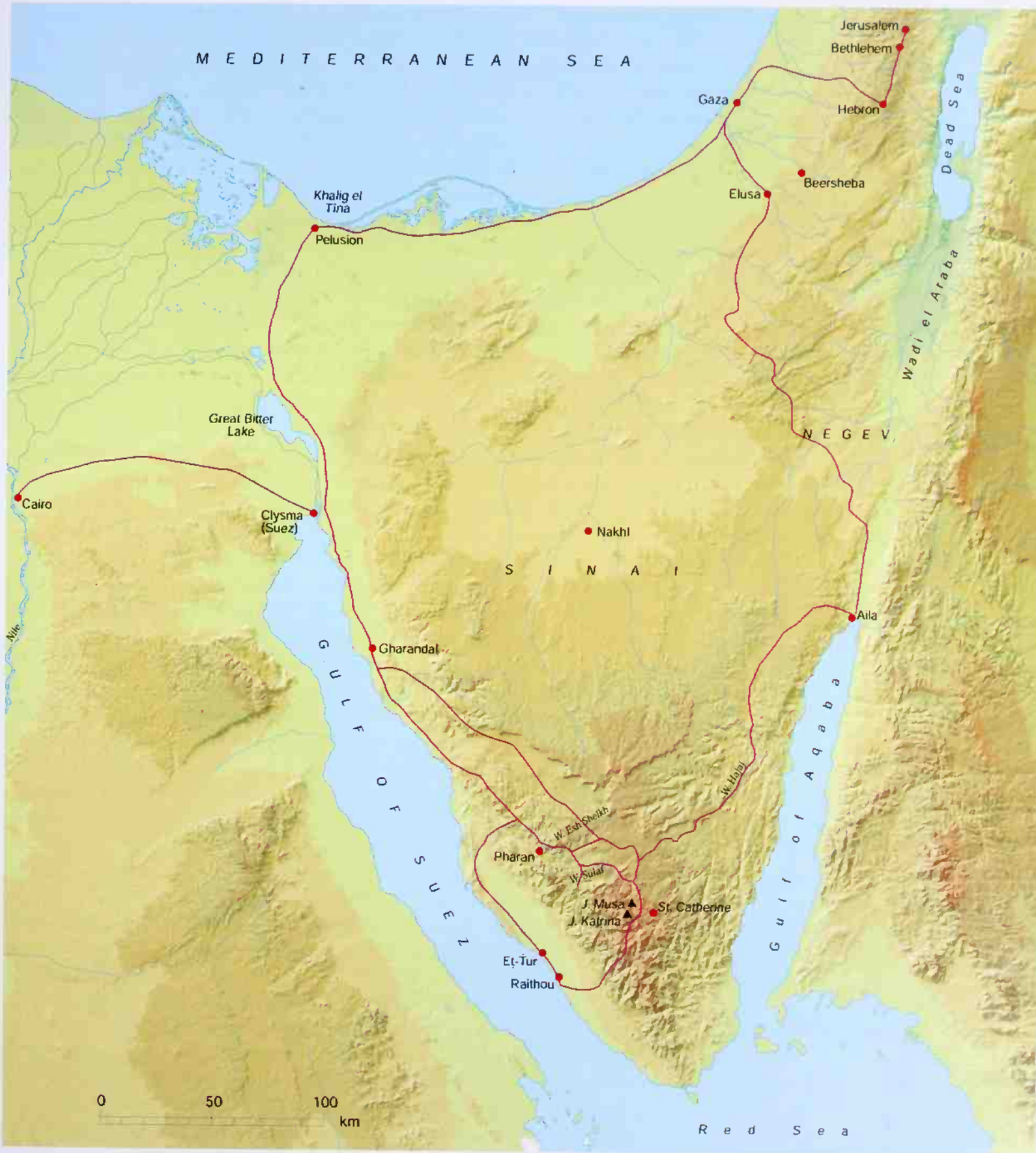


Figure 71
Map of the Sinai peninsula and surrounding areas, showing pilgrimage routes. Map © Sorfer Cartography Ltd., Jerusalem, Israel.

by the intensification of relations between Georgia and the Sinai monastery from the mid-ninth century on, with monasteries in Syria-Palestine presumably acting as intermediaries. King Giorgi II (r. 915–59) ordered hymns and sermons from the Georgian monk Ioane Minchi on Mount Sinai.[16] Saint Elijah the Younger, a Greek born in Sicily, became a monk in the Holy Land and visited Sinai, presumably in the 870s.[17] Western or Latin pilgrimage to the region is implied by four pieces of evidence. The first three are tiny tags accompanying stones, preserved respectively in the Sancta Sanctorum at the Vatican, at Chelles, and at Sens (the latter two in France), identifying these relics as coming from "Mount Sinai, where Moses stood." On paleographic grounds the tags have been ascribed respectively to the seventh–eighth century, around 800, and the early ninth century. In addition we have the story of a nobleman from Brittany, Frotmundus, who was ordered between 830 and 850 to undertake pilgrimages as penance or punishment, one of them to Sinai.[18]

Holy Land pilgrimage was severely affected for some years by the destruction of the Holy Sepulcher by the Egyptian sultan al-Hakim in 1009, and again later in the eleventh century by unsafe conditions in Egyptian-held territory in Syria and Palestine. Byzantine pilgrimage appears to have been a regular mass movement involving ecclesiastical and lay visitors, both men and women, while Latin pilgrimage was irregular and on a much smaller scale.[19] Visits to Sinai are not directly attested in that period.[20] They are, however, suggested by a Latin guide-book, compiled in the first decade of the twelfth century and based on an earlier one, which states the distance from the Jordan River to Mount Sinai and, strangely, mentions "a great oil jar [there], which never ceases to produce oil."[21] This anticipates the reference of later pilgrims to Saint Catherine's oil in the monastery.

The establishment of Christian rule over Jerusalem and the holiest Christian sites in 1099 in the wake of the First Crusade furthered large-scale Western, or Latin, pilgrimage to the Holy Land, which reached its peak in the thirteenth century. Thousands of pilgrims arrived each year on board Western ships in Acre, except during the city's occupation by Egyptian forces from 1187 to 1191.[22] Few pilgrims appear to have visited Sinai. The Englishman Saewulf and the Germans John of Würzburg and Theodoric (on pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1102, ca. 1165, and 1169, respectively) refrained from the journey to Sinai and merely reproduced the information about the distance from the Jordan to Mount Sinai from a book similar to the early-twelfth-century guide mentioned above.[23] The poorly informed Latin author of a treatise written around 1150 asserted that smoke constantly rose from Mount Sinai.[24] However, a version of the treatise on holy sites (Ms. D) by Rorgo Fretellus of Nazareth, composed in the reign of King Amalric of Jerusalem (1162–73), offers a detailed description of the monastery and of the monks' practices.[25]

The monastery remained in the Egyptian political orbit in the first decades of the twelfth century. The construction of a mosque within its walls, intended for Muslim travelers, was completed by 1106. A source from the 1140s at the earliest claims that in 1116 the monks requested the Latin king of Jerusalem, Baldwin I, to refrain from a visit for fear of Egyptian reprisals. The story does not warrant any conclusion regarding Latin pilgrimage to the monastery in that period, regardless of whether it is authentic. In 1134 the Egyptian caliph Hafiz confirmed the earlier privileges of the monastery. Crusader or Frankish rule around the Gulf of Elat/Aqaba was extended at the earliest under King Fulk of Jerusalem (r. 1131–43). As a result, the Sinai peninsula was included in the lordship of Montréal in Transjordan and the ecclesiastical province of Petra. In a letter purportedly written around 1150, a monk from Grandmont, in the diocese of Lyons, claimed to have obtained the oil of

Saint Catherine at the monastery, yet there are serious doubts about the reliability of his account. Philip of Nablus, lord of Montréal from 1161 to 1166, reported that on pilgrimage to the monastery he persuaded the abbot to open Saint Catherine's tomb and grant him a relic of the saint, yet he failed to mention oil.[26] This is the earliest secure testimony to the saint's cult in the monastery. A Latin monk of the second half of the twelfth century, reporting his Sinai pilgrimage, refers to Saint Catherine.[27]

The earliest reference to the celebration of the saint in the Sinai monastery appears in the monastery's *Typikon* of 1214 regulating liturgical services, drafted by Abbot Symeon.[28] Three years later the German Thietmar fulfilled his wish to see the body of Saint Catherine that exudes oil. In order to enhance the prestige of the saint's relics, the monks were asserting then that the lord of Montréal, Philip of Nablus, had attempted to snatch them.[29] By that time the presence of the relics in the monastery was obviously well known among Latin pilgrims arriving in the Holy Land. The monks must have been attentive to that development, as well as to the intensification of Latin pilgrimage to the Holy Land after 1191, since they had a dependency in Acre.[30] It is not impossible, therefore, that they sanctioned the cult of Saint Catherine in order to stimulate Latin pilgrimage to their monastery.

The awareness of Abbot Symeon of the material interests of his monastery is well illustrated by his endeavor to safeguard the monastery's property. At his request Doge Pietro Ziani granted in 1212 Venice's protection over the monastery's numerous assets in Crete, a Byzantine province until its occupation by Venice in the early thirteenth century, and in 1217 Pope Honorius III extended papal protection over all the monastery's possessions. In addition to Crete, these possessions were located in the Frankish states of the Levant, Cyprus, and Constantinople, all under Latin rule at that time, as well as in Alexandria and Damascus.[31] There is no evidence that the monastery's presence in these locations stimulated pilgrimage to Sinai.

Significantly, the letters of the Venetian doge and the pope in 1212 and 1217, respectively, refer to Saint Mary of Mount Sinai, a wording most likely reflecting the language of the abbot's request for protection. It is also noteworthy that among the monastery's dependencies only one bore the name of Saint Catherine, namely in Acre, whereas elsewhere they carried the names of other saints. It follows that at that time the newly introduced cult of Saint Catherine did not yet overshadow the long-established cults of the Virgin and Moses in the monastery. The cohabitation of the three cults is confirmed by the *Typikon* of 1214, a thirteenth-century panel depicting Saint Catherine and the Virgin of the Burning Bush (cat. no. 56), and various other icons.[32] This cohabitation is still attested by some Western pilgrim accounts of the fifteenth century, although by then Western devotion to Saint Catherine had assumed primacy. One such account refers to "the church of Saint Mary of the Bush (Latin, *de Rubo*), which we now call the church of Saint Catherine."[33] This contrasts with the attitude of the popes, who until 1517 exclusively referred to the Virgin in their letters addressed to the monastery.[34]

The formal adoption of Saint Catherine's cult in the monastery in 1214 does not seem to have generated a large-scale Latin response in the short term. As noted earlier, Thietmar traveled to the monastery three years later, thirty years after the end of Frankish rule over most of the Holy Land and Sinai. Significantly, he grew a beard and dressed like a Georgian or, according to another version of his account, like a Greek monk to conceal his Latin identity while traveling through Muslim territory.[35] Incidentally, coming from the region east of the Jordan, he must have followed the customary pilgrimage route from Aila through eastern Sinai. His

isolated testimony seems to imply that few other Latins made the journey accomplished by Georgian or Byzantine monks.[36] Economic considerations were an important impediment to Latin pilgrimage to Sinai in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The trip could not be included within the common pilgrimage timetable of one month, the maximum period between the arrival of Western ships in Acre and their departure in the spring and in the autumn.[37] As a result, the costly journey to the monastery entailed additional expenses for a prolonged stay in the Holy Land or in Egypt until the following trans-Mediterranean sailing season. Latins who had settled in the Frankish states of the Levant or in Cyprus, which was under Latin rule from 1191 on, did not encounter these problems. Nevertheless, Philip of Nablus, mentioned earlier, is the only known Latin settler to have visited Sinai. It would seem, therefore, that the numerous icons preserved in the Sinai monastery displaying "Western" features or donors were not brought there by Latin pilgrims and settlers but rather were sent to the monastery from Acre by people unwilling or unable to undertake the journey.

Twelfth- and thirteenth-century Orthodox pilgrimage to the Holy Land was more important than commonly assumed, though it was conducted on a much smaller scale than was Latin pilgrimage.[38] The evidence regarding the Sinai monastery is meager. The Greek John Phokas, on pilgrimage in 1177, refers only to the Sinai desert and does not even mention the monastery.[39] The youngest son of King Stefan Nemanja of Serbia, Sava, who from 1219 was the first primate of Serbia's autonomous Church, conducted his second pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1234–35. In order to visit Sinai he traveled from Jerusalem to Egypt, where Sultan al-Kamil granted him the requested permit and provided a guide who escorted him to the monastery.[40] This princely visit does not warrant any broader conclusions about Orthodox pilgrimage. An anonymous Byzantine pilgrim guide of 1253/54 offers more convincing evidence in that respect. It traces a journey from Egypt through Raithou on the Gulf of Suez to the monastery, with return to Egypt.[41] It is possible that after the establishment of Egyptian rule over Jerusalem and Sinai in 1187, Orthodox pilgrims preferred to obtain permits in Egypt, rather than travel to the holy sites via Frankish Acre. An inscription close to the monastery and another on the wooden door of its church attest to Armenian pilgrimage in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[42] The Egyptian taxation treatise compiled by al-Makhzumi around 1170 mentions an exit tax of one dinar imposed on each indigenous Christian leaving Egypt for pilgrimage to Jerusalem.[43] It is likely that most Coptic pilgrims traveled overland, yet it is unclear whether any of them visited the Sinai monastery.

Latin pilgrimage to the Levant was abruptly interrupted by the fall of the Frankish states to the Muslims and the destruction of Acre in 1291 yet resumed about a decade later on a much reduced scale.[44] In contrast, the flow of pilgrims to Sinai became far more important than in the previous two centuries, and its nature underwent drastic changes.

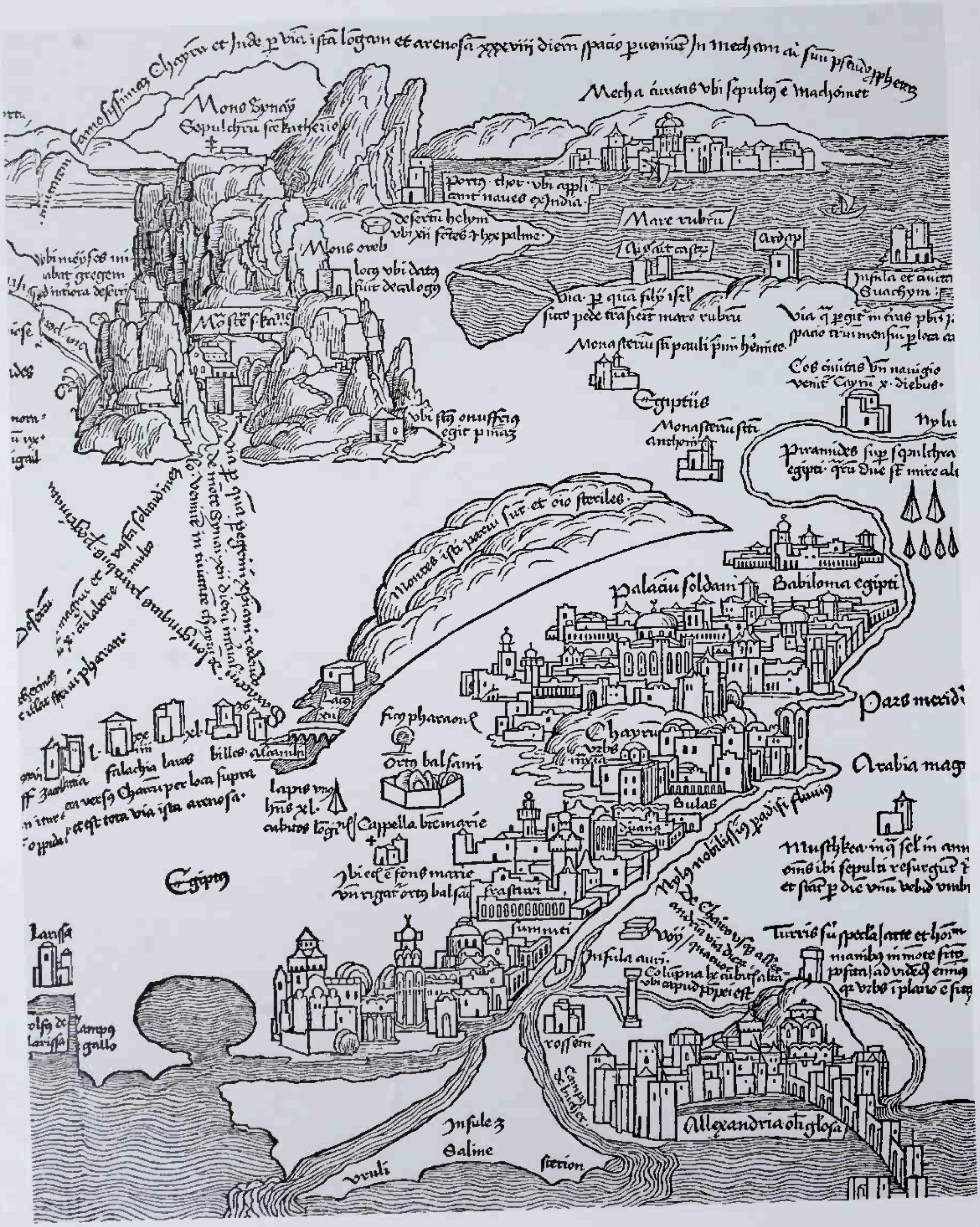
By the fourteenth century pilgrims were expecting spiritual reward for their visits to holy sites, each of which was assigned a specific value for the remission of temporal sins. It was believed that pilgrims could transfer indulgences to individuals not undertaking the journey.[45] The Sinai monastery was included among the sites benefiting from special status in 1328, when Pope John XXII granted a one-year indulgence for visits to "the church of Saint Catherine's monastery in Mount Sinai." The pope's declaration clearly came in response to strong pressure from pilgrims, which accounts for his use of the already common popular designation of the monastery, in contrast to the official reference to the Virgin in papal letters.[46] An anonymous guidebook from around 1350 provides the earliest listing of indulgences for holy sites in the Levant, including the church of Saint Catherine and Mount Sinai. Additional sites in

the vicinity appear in later lists, at times with differing values.[47] By that time Saint Catherine was associated in the West with the holiest sites of Christendom. In 1352 a hosier of London bequeathed twenty pounds to any pilgrim going to Jerusalem and Saint Catherine.[48] Ogier VIII, lord of Anglure, stated that the object of his pilgrimage in 1395–96 was to visit Jerusalem, Saint Catherine, and the early hermitages of Saint Anthony and Saint Paul in the Egyptian desert.[49]

Accounts of pilgrimage to the Holy Land and Sinai became more numerous during the first half of the fourteenth century, and one or several of them have survived from almost every year of the fifteenth century.[50] Pilgrims included information culled from earlier guidebooks and lists of indulgences,[51] even if they did not personally visit the sites they mentioned. Franceschino of Pontremoli, pilgrim in 1383, listed the holy sites of Sinai and Egypt, yet from his travel and expense records it is clear that he did not visit any of them.[52] Many authors listed places, routes, distances, coins, prices, and expenses—item per item—and recorded personal experiences for the benefit of future pilgrims, yet also as testimony to the accomplishment of their pilgrimage.[53] Giovanni, son of the merchant Anselmo Adorno, in 1470 and the Dominican friar Felix Faber in the 1480s were particularly keen observers who took abundant notes day by day.[54] Bernhard von Breydenbach, pilgrim in 1483, planned ahead a printing of his travel account and hired the Utrecht painter Erhard Reuwich to accompany him as "visual recorder" of the journey. The account first appeared in Latin in 1486 and saw twelve editions until 1522. It was almost immediately translated into German, Dutch, French, and Spanish. The numerous woodcuts in the book, one of them including Sinai (fig. 72), were among the latter's main attractions. Printing opened a new era in the diffusion of pilgrimage accounts, and Reuwich's illustrations were extremely influential in later depictions of Sinai.[55]

The destruction of Acre in 1291 generated an important shift in pilgrimage itineraries to the holy sites of the Levant. Venice as transit station and Venetian ships fulfilled a decisive role in the transportation of pilgrims, who disembarked in Jaffa or in Alexandria (fig. 73).[56] In Venice in 1384 Lionardo Frescobaldi met Venetians and Frenchmen who boarded galleys transporting pilgrims to Jaffa in order to proceed to the Holy Sepulcher, whereas the group of fourteen Florentines to which Frescobaldi belonged sailed on a cog to Alexandria. Only his party intended to reach Sinai.[57] The important role of the Cypriot port of Famagusta as relay station accounts for the presumed intervention of King Peter I of Cyprus on behalf of the pilgrims. The treaty of 1370 between Cyprus and Egypt, which is missing, apparently contained a clause ensuring that Latins visiting the Holy Sepulcher and Saint Catherine would not pay higher taxes than before 1365.[58] The specific reference to the monastery is significant.

The continuous flow of pilgrims through Egypt had earlier induced the Egyptian jurist al-Subki, who died in 1335, to define Latin pilgrims as a special category of non-Muslims, different from that of Latin merchants.[59] Under the restrictive system imposed on Latin foreigners in Alexandria, the pilgrims were compelled to reside in *funduq*s, or compounds, assigned to Latin merchants. They lodged successively in the *funduq*s of Marseilles, the Catalans, the French, and Narbonne, and again the Catalans, as attested respectively in 1323, 1381, 1384, 1395, and 1483.[60] The passage through Alexandria enabled the pilgrims to see the two columns between which Saint Catherine had been martyred, the nearby prison in which she had been kept, and the place from which the angels had carried her body to Sinai. However, not all Latin pilgrims passing through Egypt visited Sinai. Those undertaking the journey traveled to Cairo, where the residing representative of the Sinai monastery gave them useful advice about the journey. In 1470 a Greek monk from Sinai—who spoke Italian and was from


Mons Synay
Mecha ciuitas vbi sepulty e Machomet
Mons oreb
Mare rubru
Egiptus
Palaciu soldani
Babilonia egipti
Chayru
Ortus balsami
Cappella bte marie
Larissa
Insula auri
Insule 3
Saline

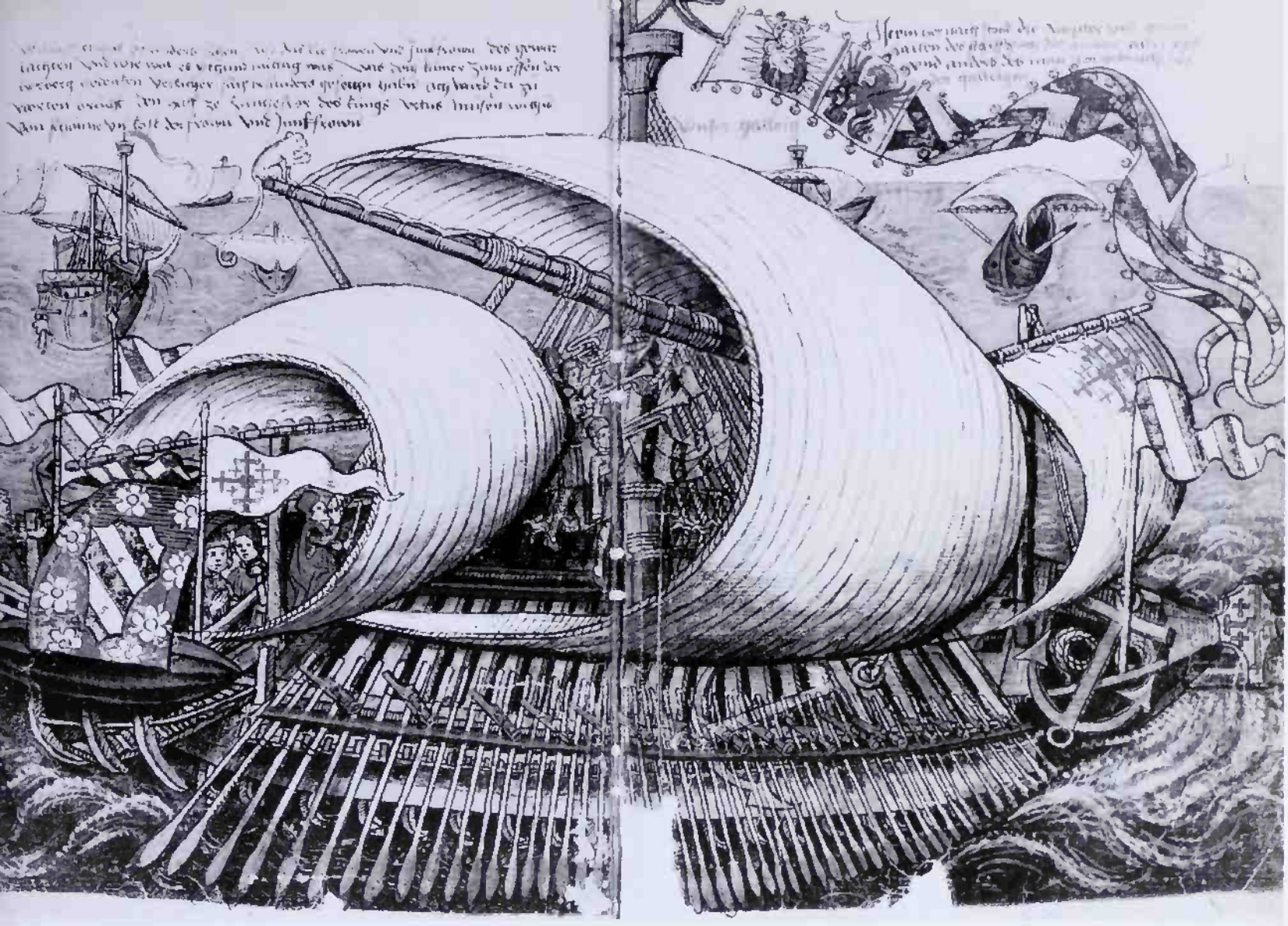


Figure 72 (opposite)
Erhard Reuwich, *The Holy Land*. Woodcut. In Bernhard von Breydenbach, *Die heyligen reyssen gen Jherusalem*, the author's pilgrimage account of 1483, first printed in Mainz, 1486. The upper left section shows the monastery and the holy sites around it; the upper right section shows the Red Sea and holy sites in southern Egypt

Figure 73 (above)
La Contarina, illustration showing a Venetian ship transporting pilgrims in the last decades of the fifteenth century. In the Ms. of Gruenemberg, late fifteenth century. Badische Landesbibliothek, Karlsruhe, Germany (St. Peter, Pap. 32).

Candia, the capital of Venetian Crete—served as guide to Anselmo Adorno and his party from Cairo to the monastery.[61] The pilgrims coming from Egypt traveled mainly through Raithou, along one of the routes of western Sinai common in the Byzantine period.

Western pilgrims leaving Jerusalem for Sinai proceeded through Bethlehem and Hebron to Gaza, where they were sometimes allowed to take a hot bath in common with Muslims.[62] In the fifteenth century there seem to have been regular departures from Jerusalem. Pero Tafur, pilgrim in 1435, failed to join the caravan leaving for Saint Catherine and, therefore, proceeded through Egypt.[63] Felix Faber missed the departure of 1480 and, therefore, decided to include the journey in his second pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1483. He then met a Muslim who spoke Italian and faulty German, learned from pilgrims whom he often led to Saint Catherine.[64]

The pilgrims traveling to Sinai were of mixed origin yet generally preferred to travel with fellow countrymen or people speaking their language. However, in 1346 Niccolò da Poggibonsi left Cairo in a group comprising two Englishmen, one Syrian or Oriental Christian, and three Greeks from Constantinople. Later, on his way to Gaza, he encountered a group of Frenchmen who were traveling to Saint Catherine.[65] In 1384 the party of fourteen Tuscans, including Lionardo Frescobaldi, met—at the monastery—high-ranking pilgrims from Germany, Flanders, England, France, and Gascony.[66] On his return voyage in 1394 Niccolò di Martoni left Rhodes with French noblemen who had visited Sinai.[67] On his first

pilgrimage in 1480 Felix Faber met two Englishmen who intended to reach Saint Catherine, yet he could not converse with them since they spoke neither German nor Latin.[68]

The fourteenth- and fifteenth-century accounts provide detailed evidence about the difficulties encountered along the way, especially the nature of arid and rugged terrain, the heat, the lack or scarcity of good drinking water, and the fierce sandstorms. In 1394 Niccolò di Martoni and other pilgrims bought lemon and other syrups in Cairo, as recommended before departure, in order to mix them with poor-quality water. He ascribed the death of five young pilgrims in his group to their lack of syrups.[69] Cautious pilgrims prepared spectacles attached to cloth or leather to protect their eyes during sandstorms.[70] The journey was fraught with dangers because of occasional attacks by Bedouins, who sometimes could be kept at bay with bribes. The pilgrims also describe the wretched conditions of Arab nomads they met and strange animals they had never seen before. In 1470, between the Gulf of Suez and the monastery, Adorno noted inscriptions in Latin characters carved on rocks by earlier pilgrims.[71]

The pilgrims resided from five to seven days in the monastery. Some of them offered detailed descriptions of its structures, the monks, their way of life and rituals, the location and nature of Saint Catherine's relics, the practices surrounding them, and the holy sites in the vicinity (fig. 74). Incidentally, for the ascent of the holy mountains the monks leased to the pilgrims canes supposedly made of the same wood as Moses' rod, as reported by a pilgrim of 1486.[72] There are numerous discrepancies between the accounts with respect to the number of monks, which appears to have seriously dwindled in the second half of the fifteenth century. Ludolph of Sudheim, pilgrim between 1336 and 1341, is the only fourteenth- or fifteenth-century pilgrim to mention the presence of Ethiopian, Coptic, and Syrian monks in the monastery, in addition to Greeks.[73] The absence of Latin monks is noteworthy. Giacomo da Verona, pilgrim in 1335, noted twelve columns and three hundred lamps in the church, and many well-adorned chapels with numerous painted panels and small icons, crosses, and lamps. He was fortunate to touch Saint Catherine's skull and receive in small glass vials the oil it exuded.[74] A Latin copy of his account, executed in 1420, includes a drawing of the holy sites of Sinai (fig. 75).[75] In 1346 Niccolò da Poggibonsi expressed the emotional release of his party at the sight of Saint Catherine's body, after the arduous journey through the desert. He failed in his attempt to count all the lamps, many of gold and silver, yet the monks told him there were more than fifteen hundred of them.[76] Niccolò di Martoni, pilgrim in 1394, was deeply impressed by the marble, the figured mosaics, and the large number of beautiful icons in Saint Catherine's church. He had never seen so many burning lamps in a place of worship.[77]

In the second half of the fifteenth century the Saint Catherine monks sought to take advantage of the regular flow of Latin pilgrims, which yielded income in kind and in cash. By 1470 they had set aside a small rectangular room for the celebration of Latin Mass and two very small adjoining rooms for the accommodation of Latin pilgrims.[78] The Latin groups were obviously small. As in the fourteenth century, there is no evidence of Latin monks in residence. After sighting Saint Catherine's relics and obtaining the oil in glass vials, each group of pilgrims affixed poems or prayers composed in the saint's honor to her tomb or to the wall of a hall in which they stayed.[79] The pilgrims believed that devotional objects, rings, jewels, and silk touching Saint Catherine's relics acquired healing or other miracle-working properties.[80] In the fourteenth and especially the fifteenth century some pilgrims from France, Germany, England, and the Low Countries incised their names on the walls of a large hall situated

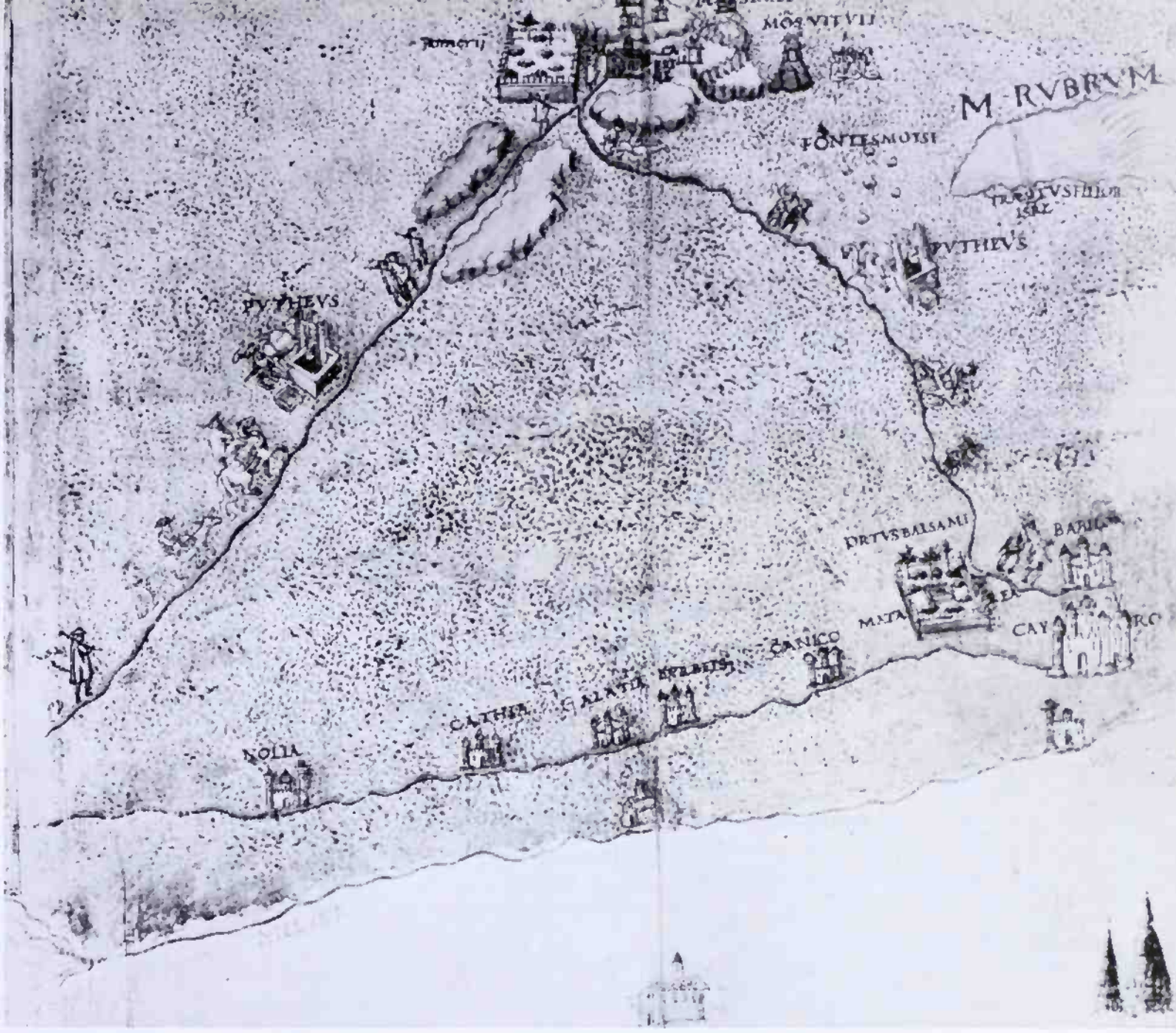


Figure 74
Pilgrimage to Mount Sinai. In Ms. of Gabriele Capodilista, pilgrim in 1458. Private collection.

behind Justinian's basilica. A number of noblemen added their coat of arms and emblems. Several pilgrims who recorded their names are also known from the accounts of their respective journeys.[81]

The evidence regarding Orthodox pilgrimage to Sinai in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is sparse. We have already noted three Greeks from Constantinople traveling in 1346. A text added to an anonymous Russian description of Constantinople, the latter based on a Greek text of 1389–91, relates that the Byzantine emperor spent two years in disguise in the Holy Land, went to Mount Sinai, where he remained for one month, and proceeded to Egypt.[82] The reference to the emperor appears to reflect Byzantine pilgrimage via Jerusalem to Sinai around that time. It recalls an apocryphal story about the emperor in disguise visiting the Holy Sepulcher, recorded in the eleventh century.[83] A Greek inscription dated 1461 found at Et-Tur, to the north of Raithou on the Gulf of Suez, was left by an Orthodox pilgrim coming from Egypt on his way to the Sinai monastery.[84] The same itinerary was followed by the metropolitan (Orthodox archbishop) of Ephesos, Daniel, who in 1480/81 carried out an

inspection tour of the patriarchates of Alexandria, Jerusalem, and Antioch on behalf of the patriarch of Constantinople, Maximos III Christonymos. He traveled from Egypt through Raithou to the monastery of Saint Catherine and then to Gaza.[85] A guide compiled between 1475 and 1481 by a Greek apparently from Constantinople contains two unconnected itineraries, one leading from Jaffa to sites in the Holy Land as far as the Jordan, while the other begins in the Egyptian port of Damietta and covers Egypt and Sinai with passage through Raithou.[86] The second itinerary appears to follow in abbreviated form the account of Metropolitan Daniel, even in details such as the comparison between Cairo and Constantinople, and is possibly based on the earlier account. The *Anonymus Allatii*, ascribed to the mid-fifteenth century, contains descriptions of Mount Sinai and Raithou, yet without indication of itinerary.[87]

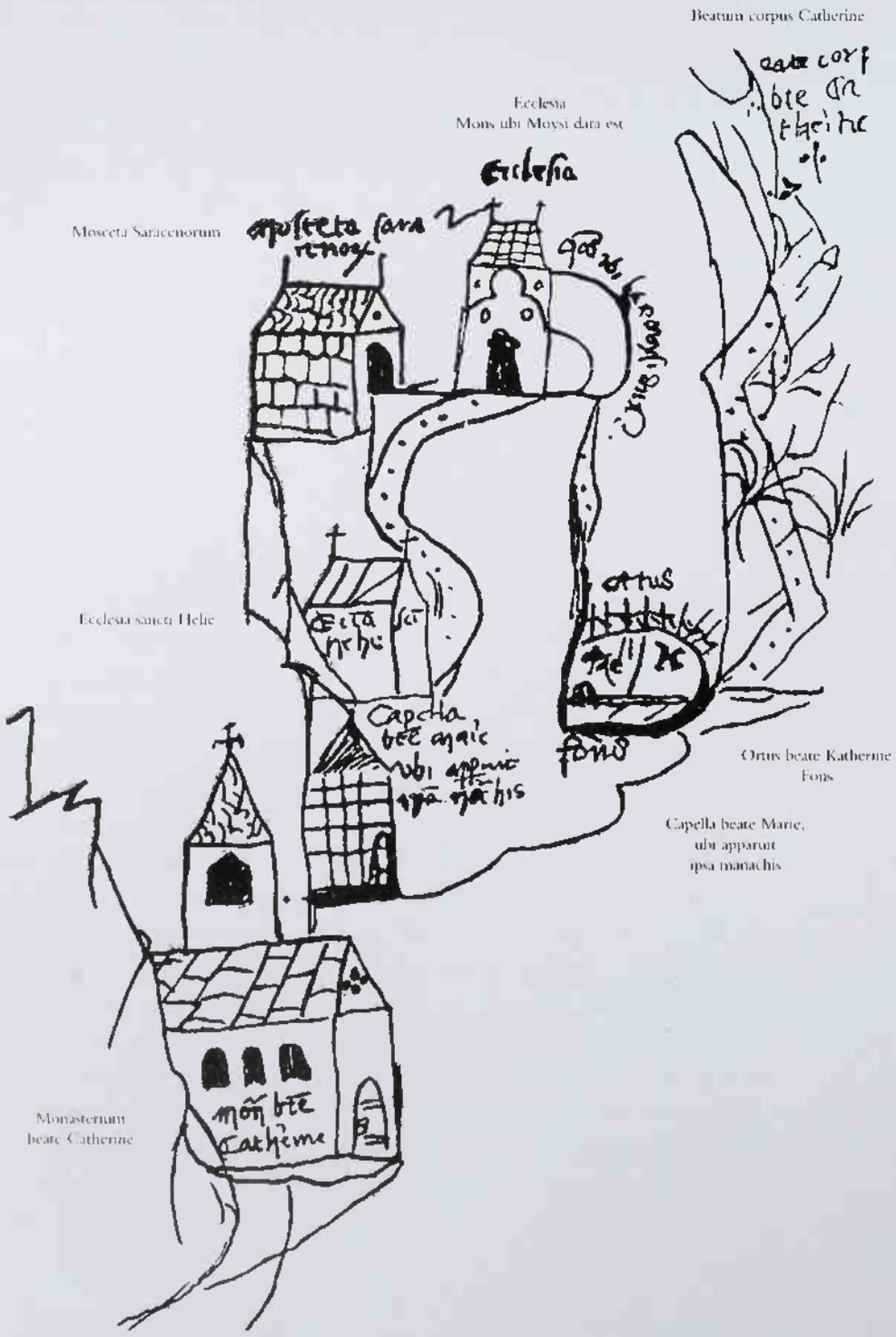


Figure 75
Sinai monastery and the holy sites nearby. Drawing. In *Liber peregrinationis Fratris Jacobi de Verona* (pilgrimage of 1335), 1420 copy.

Georgian inscriptions dated to the fourteenth century have been found in Wadi Haggag.[88] They reveal that some pilgrims still reached the Sinai monastery via Aila, as in the Byzantine period. However, a fifteenth-century inscription found in a monastic cell at Et-Tur may imply Armenian pilgrimage through Egypt.[89] In 1463 four Armenians left their names on the peak of Mount Sinai. Two of them later became Armenian patriarchs of Jerusalem.[90] It is unclear whether in that period they or their fellow countrymen were also visiting the monastery, whose monks were strongly opposed to the anti-Chalcedonian Armenians and Jacobites, as attested by Felix Faber in the 1480s.[91] In 1441 or 1442 the Florentine Marco di Bartolommeo Rustici met on Mount Sinai an Ethiopian monk, whom he met again in Florence.[92] This encounter suggests Ethiopian pilgrimage around that time.

Russian pilgrimage to Sinai is attested in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The pilgrim guide of the archimandrite Grefenij, compiled around 1370, mentions that the journey from Cairo and from Gaza to Mount Sinai lasted fifteen days and adds that "the orthodox Christians go till there." He traveled from Smolensk and apparently consulted earlier works.[93] In 1461–62, on his second pilgrimage to the Holy Land, the monk Varsonofij from northwestern Russia traveled via Cairo to Saint Catherine's monastery, where he stayed for six days, and returned to Egypt via Raithou. He is the first Russian pilgrim to provide a detailed description of the monastery, the traditions about Moses and Saint Catherine, and the mountains associated with them.[94] Yet Zosima, on pilgrimage in the Holy Land in 1419/20, failed to visit Sinai.[95] The merchant Vasilij traveled from Egypt to Jerusalem in 1465/66 without passing through Saint Catherine.[96] The Pseudo Ignatij pilgrim guidebook, ascribed to 1475–87, mentions only the distance from Jerusalem to Mount Sinai.[97] It has been suggested that the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the practical autocephalous status of the Russian Church from 1459 onward strengthened Russian pilgrimage to the Holy Land.[98] The few sources documenting Russian pilgrimage do not warrant such conclusion.

The present short study, which is far from exhaustive, reveals the existence of large chronological gaps in the evidence bearing on Christian pilgrimage to Sinai. Moreover, the various Christian communities are unevenly represented in the sources. These sources offer at best glimpses and a biased view of the flow of pilgrimage to Sinai; nevertheless, they underline the distinctive features of that movement.

Except for monks, especially those residing in neighboring countries, Sinai was never the only or main destination of pilgrimage to biblical sites. The Sinai journey was always linked to visits to the Holy Land but differed from them in several ways. It remained of secondary importance, never became a mass movement, and was reserved exclusively for men from the late sixth century onward, since women appear to have been barred from access to the Sinai monastery.[99] The arduous and perilous Sinai pilgrimage conferred particular prestige on those undertaking it yet could never compete with the visit of holy sites connected with Christ.

There were wide fluctuations in the number of pilgrims visiting Sinai over the centuries. These were overwhelmingly Oriental Christians in the period preceding and following the Arab conquest. Literary sources document some large groups. Since most Sinai inscriptions either are undatable or can only be dated within a range of one or more centuries, they do not enable an estimate of the flow of pilgrims at any given time. Nor do the numbers of inscriptions in the various languages allow any assessment of the relative numbers of their respective speakers among the pilgrims. Furthermore, the Greek inscriptions do not permit any conclusion regarding the origin of their authors, in contrast to the Armenian, Georgian, Ethiopian, or Coptic inscriptions.[100]

Figure 76
Pol, Jean, and Herman de Limbourg (Franco-Netherlandish, act. 1399–1416). *The Body of Saint Catherine Carried by Angels to Sinai*. In *The Belles Heures of Jean, duc de Berry*, 1405–8/9, fol. 20r. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, the Cloisters Collection (54.1.1).

The Sinai pilgrimage appears to have been limited and sporadic after the Arab conquest and remained so despite the supposed presence of Saint Catherine's relics in the monastery by the 1150s at the latest and the sanction of the saint's cult in 1214. Only in the first half of the fourteenth century did that pilgrimage grow into a regular feature. It then became an overwhelmingly Western movement, involving both clerics and affluent laymen, or those supported by the latter. This movement was stimulated by the conjunction of several factors. Pilgrimage to Sinai as penance, recorded only once, in the ninth century (as discussed earlier), was a major incentive to the journey. The cult of Saint Catherine in the West assumed considerable importance, and her relics were the focus of Latin pilgrimage to Sinai (fig. 76). Finally, devotion and spiritual experience on the road to salvation were coupled with curiosity for the exotic and a quest for adventure. These factors seem to have been largely absent from pilgrimage by the members of Oriental churches in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

NOTES

1. Maraval 2002.
2. Dahari 2000, esp. pp. 21–24, 164–68.
3. Franceschini and Weber 1965, chaps. 1–6, pp. 37–46; for the prayer, see Franceschini and Weber 1965, chap. 1, p. 37.
4. Dahari 2000, pp. 54–63; J. Grossmann 2004.
5. On that decline, see note 2.
6. N. P. Ševčenko 2006. My sincere thanks to Nancy Ševčenko for kindly sharing her paper with me before its publication.
7. Stone 1982, pp. 132–33.
8. This may have been the case of a Latin psalter brought from Jerusalem, which the monk Gorasma granted to the monastery in 1230. His gift is recorded in Arabic, indicating that he was an Oriental Christian; Altbauer 1978, pp. vi–ix.
9. On Sinai monks in these cities, read further in this essay. Note also the monastery's monks bringing gifts in gold and silver from Rouen in Normandy in the first half of the eleventh century; France 1989, pp. 36–37.
10. As suggested recently by Folda 2003, p. 124, with respect to a cabinet for the cathedral of Halberstadt.
11. Reconstruction of the routes in Dahari 2000, pp. 9–15, with indication of terrain, water resources, and daily stages.
12. Pucch 1980.
13. Stone 1982, pp. 30, 32; Alishan 1884, p. 398: Anastasios of Armenia mentions an Armenian monastery *on* Mount Sinai. It is not clear whether he is referring to the monastery at the foot of the mountain.
14. Stone 1982, pp. 32, 34–36; also Stone 1986, pp. 97, 105–10.
15. Stone 1982, pp. 49, 51–52.
16. Van Esbroeck 1982, pp. 173–74, 176–79; Schrade 2001, p. 173.
17. McCormick 2001, pp. 245–47.
18. On the tags, see, respectively, Galland 2004, p. 122, no. 78, and McCormick 2001, pp. 302–3, 306, 311, 313; on Erotmundus, see Hiestand 1993, pp. 88–89.
19. Jacoby 2005.
20. Note that Rodulfus Glaber does not refer to pilgrims visiting Sinai; see note 9.
21. Hill 1962, p. 100, par. 4.
22. Jacoby 1986, pp. 27–31; Jacoby 2002; Jacoby 2004, pp. 99–102.
23. Huygens 1994, pp. 72–73, 101, 178, respectively. Dating of their journeys by Pryor 1994, p. 51, and by Huygens 1994, p. 28. On borrowings, see Huygens 1994, pp. 18–19.
24. Vogüé 1860, pp. 417–18.
25. Boeren 1980, p. 13, and, on dating of Ms. D, p. 2.
26. Mayer 1990, pp. 52–54, 61–62, 139–40, 208–15, 221–22. Philip's visit is referred to later in this essay.
27. Hiestand 1993, p. 92, esp. n. 59.
28. N. P. Ševčenko 2006 (see note 6).
29. Laurent 1857, pp. 41–45.
30. See Taŭtu 1950, pp. 35–37, no. 17.
31. Tafel and G. M. Thomas 1856–57, vol. 2, pp. 146–50; Taŭtu 1950, pp. 35–37, no. 17. The privilege of Pope Honorius III was confirmed by several of his successors: Coureas 1996.
32. Weitzmann 1974, pp. 52–53.
33. Moranvillé 1905, p. 22, and, on dating between 1410 and 1425, pp. 71–72.
34. In 1517 Pope Leo X was the first to write to the "monastery of St. Catherine of Mount Sinai"; Hofmann 1927, p. 270.
35. Laurent 1857, p. 20. The other version appears in a fifteenth-century manuscript, for which see Laurent 1857, p. 64, and its dating, p. 58.
36. Thietmar continuously used the first person in his account, yet was not alone on that pilgrimage since he refers to one of his companions: Laurent 1857, p. 36.
37. Jacoby 2002, pp. 29, 36.
38. Jacoby 2004, pp. 104–6.
39. Troickij 1889, p. XXIII, par. 25; wrong dating by Wilkinson in a note on Phokas in the volume of translations by Troickij (1889, p. 22).
40. Obolensky 1988, pp. 167–68.
41. Papadopoulos-Kerameus 1895, pp. 9–10, pars. 29–30; trans. in Külzer 1994, p. 311; on dating, Külzer 1994, p. 41.
42. Stone 1982, pp. 91 and 89, respectively.
43. Cahen 1964, p. 297, and, for dating, pp. 218–22. There was no reason for Latin pilgrims to pass through Egypt at that time.
44. Jacoby 1986, pp. 31–40, on Western pilgrimage and maritime transportation after 1291.
45. As implied in 1384 by Frescobaldi; Bartolini 1991, p. 125.
46. Hofmann 1927, pp. 258–59, and note 34 above.
47. Friedman 1983, pp. 286–91, 308–9, 320.
48. Trans. in Webb 1999, p. 140. In her will of 1410 Queen Margaret of Denmark allotted money for six men to be sent "to Jerusalem, Bethlehem and to the holy places thereabouts and to St. Katherine's"; Webb 1999, p. 141.
49. Bonnardot and Longnon 1878, p. 1, par. 1.
50. Incomplete list of dated and undated accounts and guides in Atiya 1938, pp. 490–509.
51. Hassler 1843–49, vol. 1, pp. 2–3, and vol. 2, p. 492.
52. Friedman 1983, pp. 308–9 and 300–302, lines 39–70, respectively.
53. Expense account for Sinai in Moranvillé 1905, pp. 84–86.
54. Giovanni Adorno ran out of paper while in the monastery and obtained some from the monks (see Heers and Groër 1978, p. 474); Faber's account is the most elaborate and important one of fifteenth-century pilgrimage (see Hassler 1843–49).
55. Giersch and Schmid 2004, pp. 142–67; Weiss 1988, pp. 119–20.
56. See note 44.
57. Bartolini 1991, pp. 124–25, 127, 129.
58. Mas Latrie 1852–61, vol. 2, p. 348.
59. Constable 2003, p. 115.
60. I shall address this topic in another study.
61. Heers and Groër 1978, pp. 210, 230, 236, 238, 242, 474. Provisions for the monastery were brought from Cairo and Gaza once a year: Heers and Groër 1978, p. 230.
62. Hassler 1843–49, vol. 2, p. 368.
63. Jimenez de La Espada 1874, pp. 65, 77–94.
64. Hassler 1843–49, vol. 1, pp. 61, 198.
65. Bacchi della Lega 1945, pp. 115, 136.
66. Gargiolli 1862, pp. 326–27.
67. Le Grand 1895, p. 643.
68. Hassler 1843–49, vol. 1, pp. 41–42.
69. Le Grand 1895, p. 605. Syrups are also mentioned by Adorno; see Heers and Groër 1978, p. 212.
70. Moranvillé 1905, p. 87.
71. Heers and Groër 1978, p. 222.
72. Hiestand 1993, p. 79 n. 10.
73. Neumann 1884, p. 346. In another version of the text the Ethiopians are replaced by Georgians: Deycks 1851, p. 65. On the identification of "Indi" with Ethiopians, see Cerulli 1943, pp. 147–49.
74. Röhricht 1895, pp. 229–30, and, on dating, pp. 155–56.
75. On dating, see Röhricht 1895, pp. 160–61.
76. Bacchi della Lega 1945, pp. 123, 126.
77. Le Grand 1895, pp. 606–10.
78. Heers and Groër 1978, pp. 228–30; Hassler 1843–49, vol. 2, p. 500.
79. Heers and Groër 1978, pp. 244–46; Hassler 1843–49, vol. 2, pp. 500–501.
80. Bartolini 1991, p. 155; Heers and Groër 1978, p. 226.
81. Van de Walle 1964, pp. 119–32.
82. The addition, which cannot be dated, appears in a seventeenth-century copy of the Russian version: Majeska 1984, p. 152 n. 102, and, on the guide, pp. 115–26, esp. pp. 121–22.
83. Jacoby 2005, pp. 273–74.
84. Stone 1992–94, vol. 1, p. 82, no. 904.
85. Destunis 1884, pp. 1–4; translation of the section on Sinai in Külzer 1994, pp. 340–42; on dating, Külzer 1994, pp. 28–29.
86. Papadopoulos-Kerameus 1903, pp. 1–13 and 13–16, respectively; translation of the second itinerary in Külzer 1994, pp. 335–37; on dating, Külzer 1994, pp. 45–46.
87. *PG*, vol. 133, col. 983, chap. 9, Külzer 1994, pp. 42–44.
88. Van Esbroeck 1982, pp. 174–175, 177.
89. Stone 1985–86.
90. Stone 1982, pp. 67–68.
91. Hassler 1843–49, vol. 2, p. 503.
92. Cardini 2002, p. 256.
93. Seemann 1976, pp. 198–203. Reference to Mount Sinai appears in the Leonid edition: Khitrowo 1889, p. 168.
94. Seemann 1976, pp. 261, 264–66.
95. Seemann 1976, pp. 250–59.
96. Seemann 1976, pp. 267–70.
97. Seemann 1976, pp. 276–77.
98. Seemann 1976, p. 271.
99. The Roman noblewoman Rusticiana is the last recorded female pilgrim to Mount Sinai, mentioned in August 594: Ewald and Hartmann 1957, p. 279; however, Pope Gregory I failed to refer to the monastery in the letter he sent her.
100. Many Coptic inscriptions have been found in western Sinai, yet they cannot be dated: see, for instance, Stone 1992–94, vol. 1, p. 50, no. 3567, and p. 126, no. 4638.

Visual Piety and Institutional Identity at Sinai

Kristen M. Collins

Within the church is a kind of porch five feet in width: and there is another big door, which does not open. Above this door St. Mary with her Son in her arms is represented in mosaic: on the one hand stands that precious St. Catherine, and on the other Moses, and in front of these figures, this is above the door, burn always three silver lamps.

NICCOLÒ DA POGGIBONSI[1]

Around the year 1349 the Franciscan friar Niccolò da Poggibonsi, as a part of his itinerary through the Holy Land, arrived at the monastery of Saint Catherine.[2] His account not only provides one of the few pilgrims' descriptions of the interior of the church but also documents the convergence of the three great personages of the monastery above the symbolic entrance to this holy space. No trace of a mosaic remains in this location today. Whether the friar's description refers to a lost mosaic or perhaps a group of icons hung together,[3] his account records a moment in the evolving hagiography of the site—the linking of Moses, Mary, and Catherine through works of art.

IDENTITY OF THE MONASTERY

The institution now known as the Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, more properly the Sacred and Imperial Monastery of the God-Trodden Mount Sinai, was for centuries associated with the figures of Moses and the Theotokos, or Mother of God.[4] Located at the foot of Mount Sinai, one of the great *loca sancta* (sacred places) of the Holy Land, the monastery was built on the site of the Burning Bush, out of which, according to the biblical account, God spoke to Moses (EXOD. 3:2–22, 4:1–17).

Figure 77 (opposite) Jeremiah Palladas (Cretan, seventeenth century), Saint Catherine of Alexandria, seventeenth century. Tempera and gold on panel. Iconostasis, main church, The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, Egypt. Photo: Bruce White.

When the Spanish pilgrim Egeria traveled to Sinai in the fourth century, she described a community of monastic cells scattered throughout the mountains and a church located at the base of the mountain.[5] At the time of Egeria's account, the bush grew in a garden in front of the church and marked one of the primary points on the pilgrims' circuit of this holy site; the other major destinations included the church on the mountaintop where Moses is believed to have retreated in prayer for forty days and the cave where the prophet Elijah is said to have